

SURVEY REPORT



HOW DO YOU SPEND YOUR TIME AT BEACHES ACROSS DORSET?

This Summer, Litter Free Dorset and Dorset Coast Forum asked residents and visitors to Dorset how they spend their time at beaches across Dorset. Our survey was launched on the 15th May inline with the beginning of the bathing water season and ran for 3 months. A total of 698 people participated in the survey, including 341 water users who marked their water entry points on our map. This report details the insights we discovered.

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- Popular Dorset Beaches
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The aim of our survey was to find out which beaches people were travelling to, which water sports were most popular and where people were entering the water. We also wanted to gather insights on people's perceptions of litter and water cleanliness at their local beaches.

Key Findings:

- Weymouth and Studland are the most visited beaches. Other frequently visited beaches include West Bay, Weymouth Lodmoor, and Swanage Central.
- The most common litter items are plastic wrappers and bottles. Cigarette butts, vapes, and dog poo are also prevalent.
- 65% of beach users are concerned about water quality, but only 32% check it before visiting.
- Most people use the beach throughout the year, not just during the bathing water season.
- Walking and swimming are the top activities, with social gatherings and picnics also popular.
- 115 different groups use Dorset beaches, with activities ranging from swimming to sailing.
- A significant majority (461 respondents) do not check water quality before visiting. Among those who do, the SAS App is the most popular method.

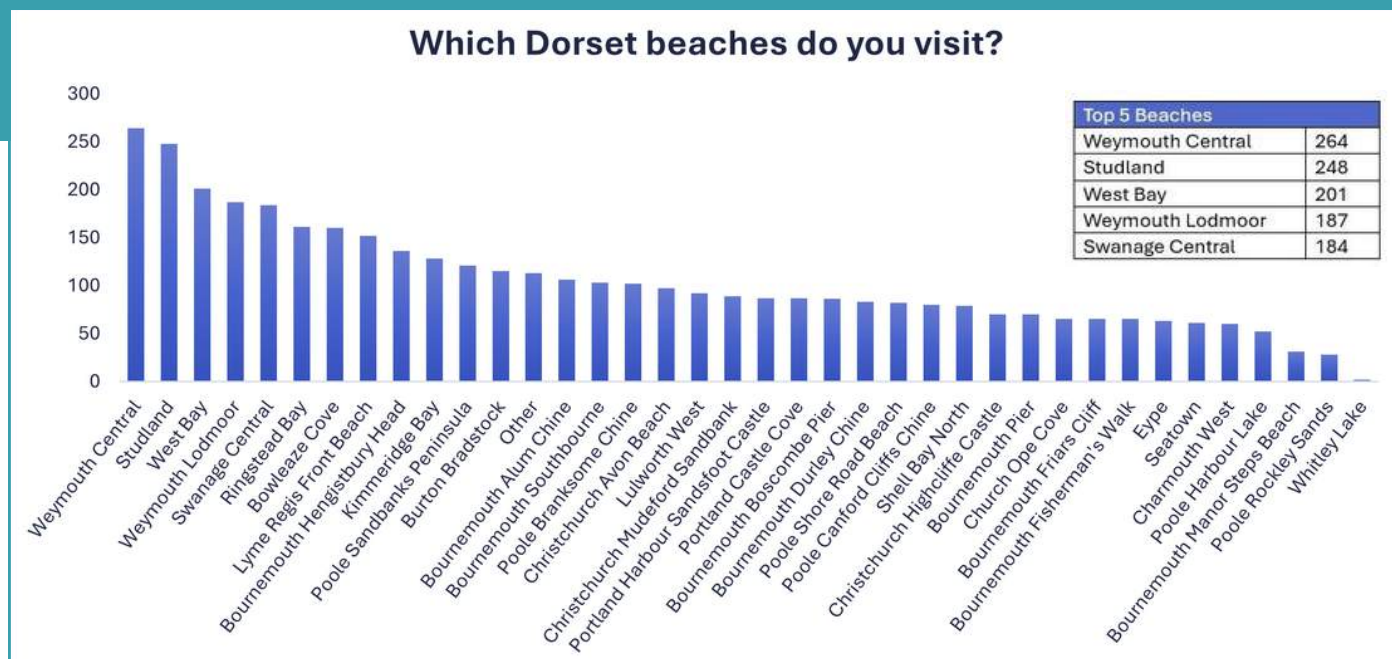


Figure 1: Most visited beaches in Dorset, when asked to select "all that apply".



Figure 2: Most visited beaches when asked to select the beach visited most often.

Beach users were asked which of the designated bathing waters they visit in Dorset, with the option to select any other beaches which they visit. The results show that the top five most visited beaches are; Weymouth Central (264), Studland (248), West Bay (201), Weymouth Lodmoor (187), and Swanage Central (184). When asked which beach the user uses most frequently the results were similar with the top five beaches were: Weymouth Central (97), Weymouth Lodmoor (72), Swanage Central (60), Studland (51), and West Bay (45). Please note, we received a greater number of responses from the Dorset Council area (70% of people lived in the Dorset Council area), the data therefore reflects this.

MOST VISITED BEACHES

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Figure 3: Bubble map showing the most visited beaches in Dorset, including undesignated beaches that were listed by respondents.



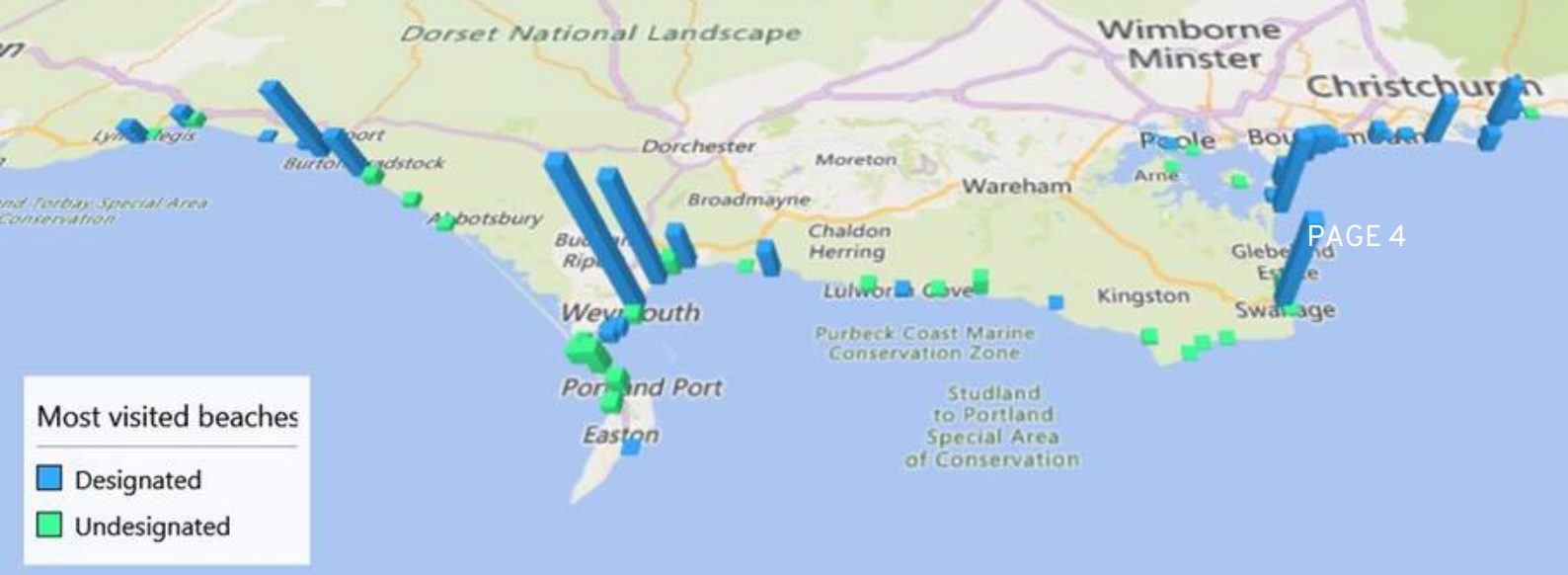


Figure 4: Illustration of the most visited beaches in Dorset

UNDESIGNATED

113 people selected an undesignated beach in the survey these included:

- Worbarrow Bay
- Black Barge Portland
- Cogden Beach
- Newton's Cove Weymouth
- Abbotsbury
- Chapmans Pool
- Mupe Bay
- Dancing Ledge
- Brownsea Island

55 people responded that an undesignated beach is the one they visit most often.

The undesignated beaches that were identified for being used for water-based activities were:

- Chesil Cove (photo on the right)
- West Bexington
- Smallmouth Cove
- Flaghead Chine
- Hamm beach / Smallmouth / Ferry Bridge
- Seacombe Cliff
- Overcombe Preston

Please note, the remaining questions in the survey, refer only to the beach that was selected as visited most often.



WATER ENTRY POINTS

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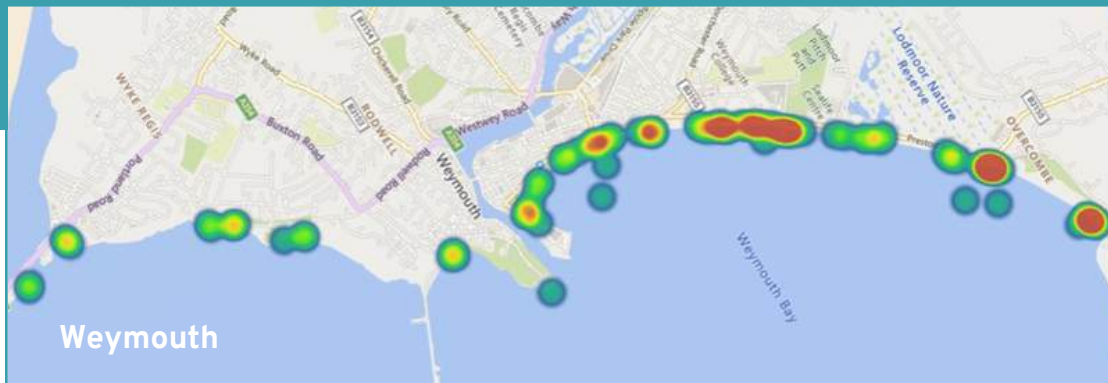


Figure 5: Heat map of water entry points in Weymouth

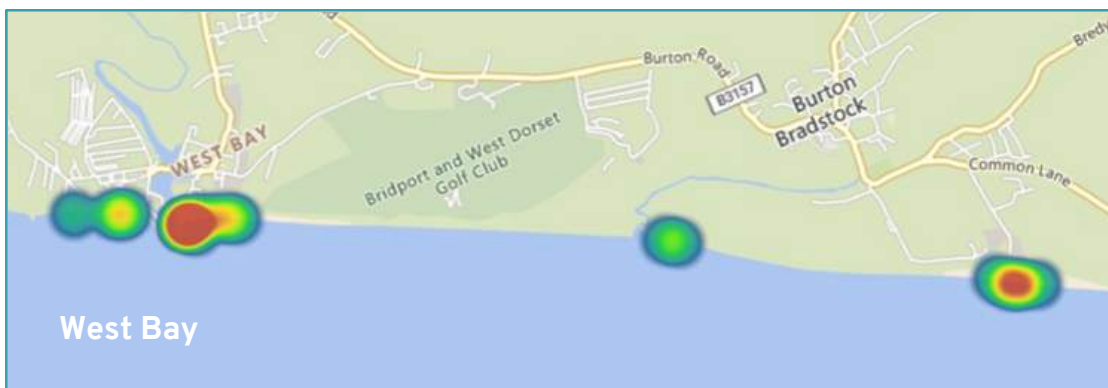


Figure 6: Heat map of water entry points in West Bay and Burton Bradstock

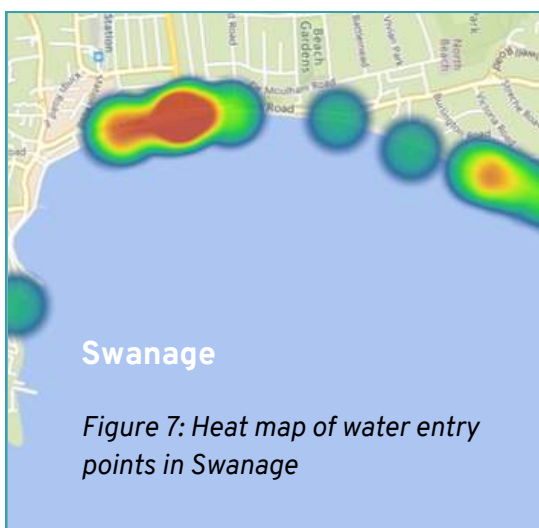


Figure 7: Heat map of water entry points in Swanage

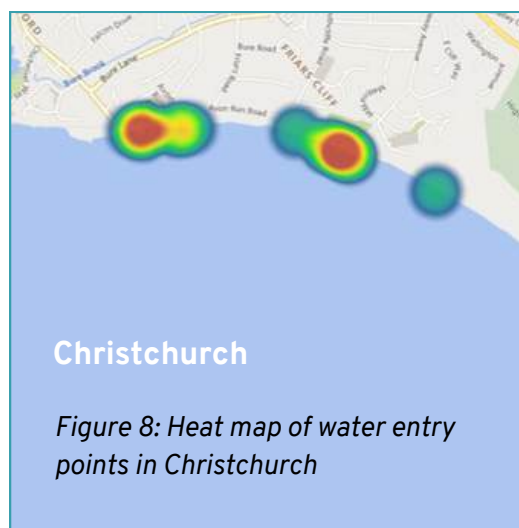


Figure 8: Heat map of water entry points in Christchurch

Out of the 698 people who participated in the survey, 341 water users marked their water entry points on our map. 82% of water users who participated in the survey were swimmers.

[LINK TO MAP >>>](#)

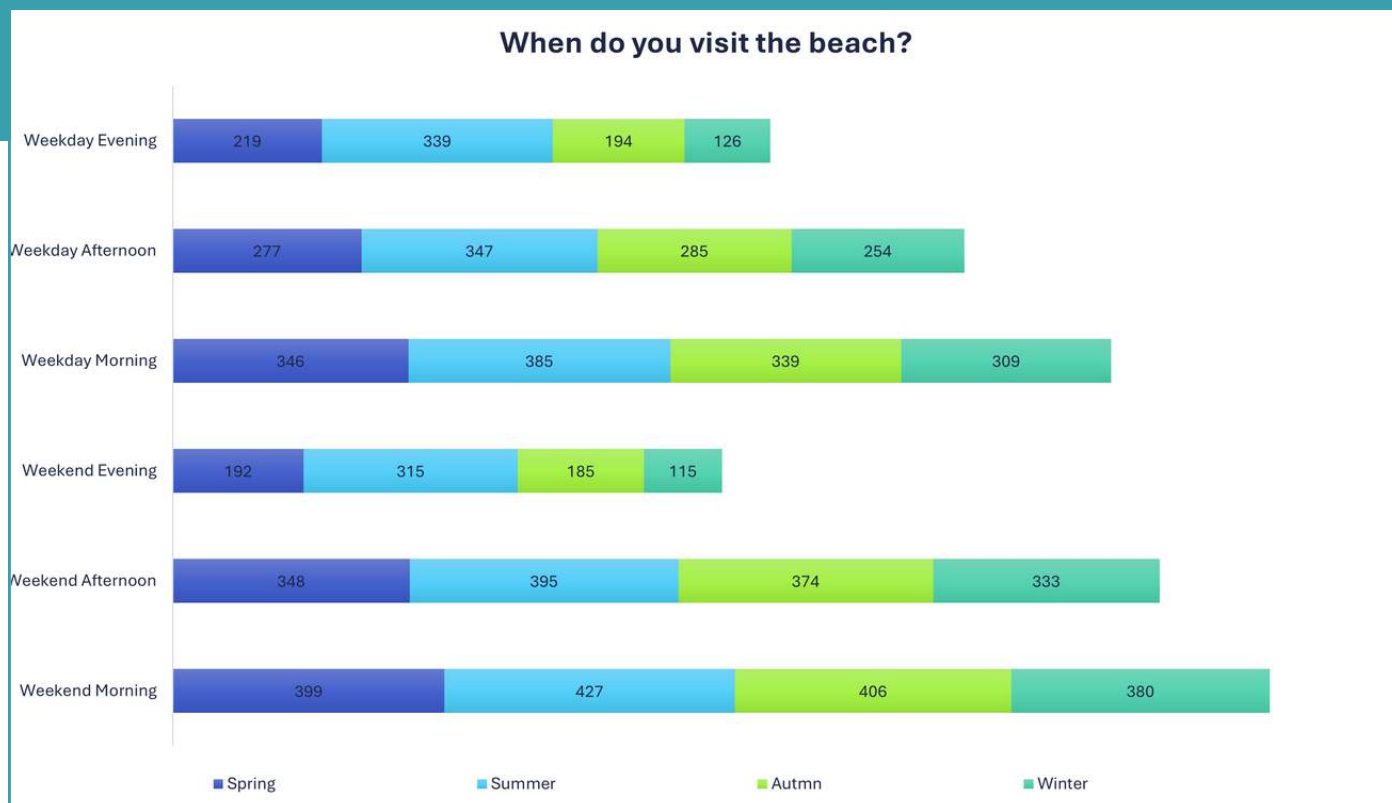


Figure 9: Bar chart which represents the times of the week and seasonal use of all beaches

Beach users were then asked when they go to the beach and how long they are spending there. Summer is the most popular time to visit the beach (640 responses), but even in winter, 568 people (81% of respondents) still visit.

For water-based activities, participation is high across spring, summer, and autumn (all above 90%), with winter still attracting 80% of water users. Most people stay at the beach for up to 3 hours.

Overall, the data suggests people enjoy the beach throughout the year, with a peak in summer. This indicates a strong, consistent interest in beach activities regardless of the season.

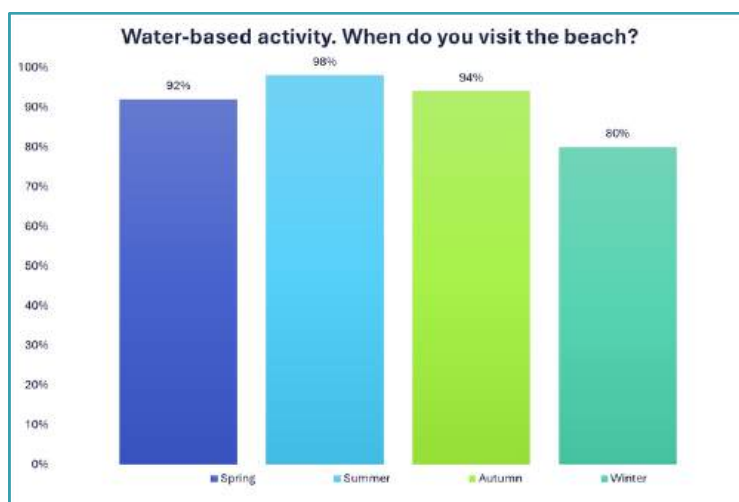


Figure 10: Bar chart which represents the seasonal use of the beach for water-users only.

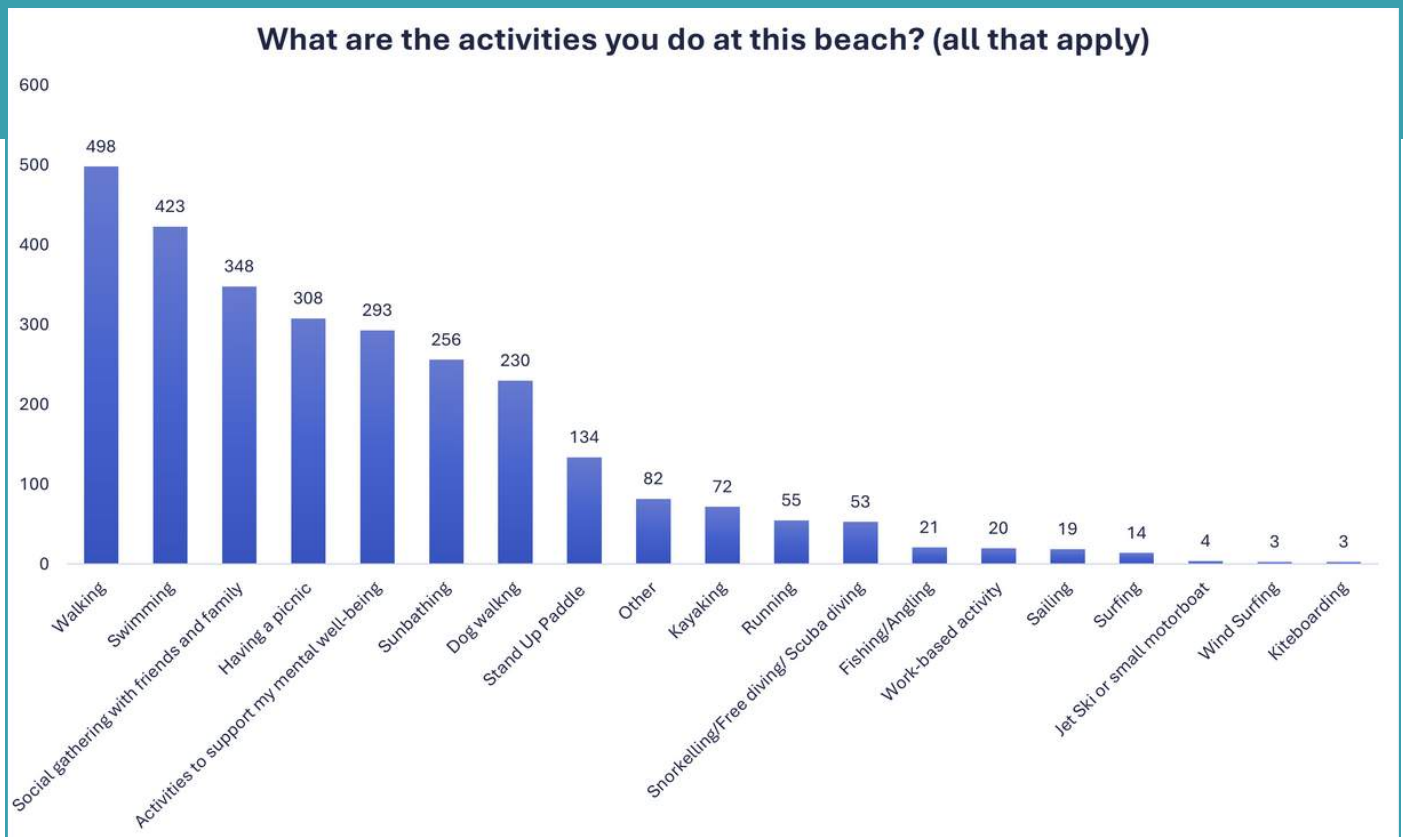


Figure 10: Most popular activities at beaches across Dorset

Walking and swimming are the top activities, with walking being the primary land-based activity (71 responses) and swimming the primary water-based activity (110 responses). Social gatherings and picnics are also popular, highlighting the beach as a social and family-friendly destination. Activities supporting mental well-being are significant, showing the beach's role in relaxation and stress relief.



Figure 11: Word cloud of "all other" activities



Play on the beach with Leah Miles and Clare Smith
Funded by The National Trust

WATER BASED ACTIVITIES

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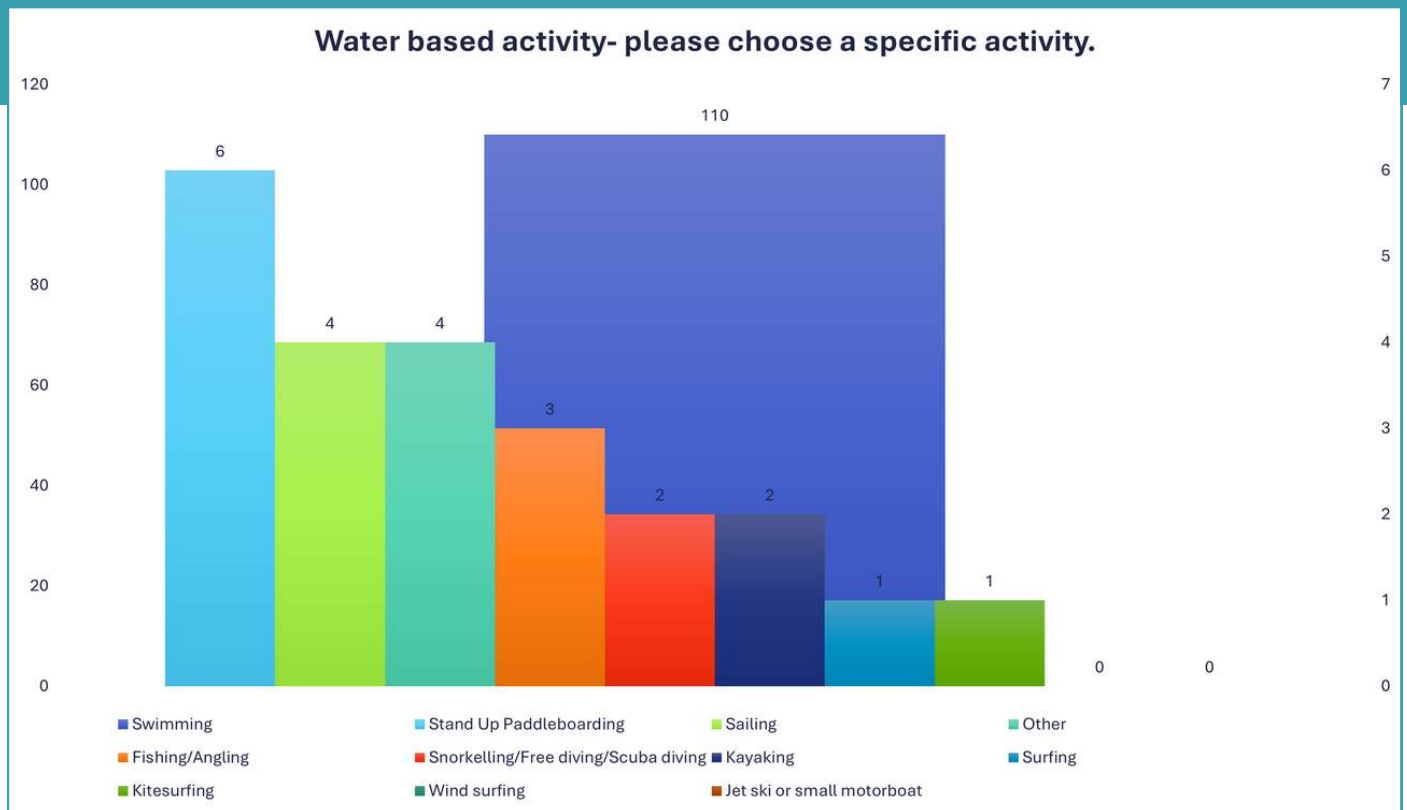


Figure 11: Bar chart which represents peoples primary water based activity

Swimming is people's primary water-based activity (110 responses). Water sports like stand-up paddle boarding, kayaking, and snorkelling have moderate participation, while more specialised activities like windsurfing and kiteboarding are less common. It is important to note that we attempted to engage with more swimming groups than any other specific recreational group – this may have impacted the survey results.



COMMUNITY GROUPS

115 different groups were identified using Dorset beaches, however only named groups are listed in the table below. Other comments simply said what type of group e.g. swimming or kayaking.

Area	List of Groups
Bournemouth	Surf Life Saving Club, Bluetits, Chill UK, Above and Beyond.
Christchurch	Bluetits, Shoresports, Christchurch Ornithological Group, Ramblers, Chilly Dippers.
Lyme Regis	Bluetits, Power Boat Club, Lyme Regis Sailing Club.
Poole	Bluetits, East Dorset Open Water Swimming Club, Poole Harbour Canoe Club, Poole Sailing Club, Surf Live Saving Club.
Portland	Bluetits, Castle Cove Sailing Club, Portland Boat Club, Sea Cadets.
Ringstead	BustinSkin (triathlon and events club).
Studland	Bluetits, Redcliffe Yacht Club.
Swanage	Bluetits, Cumulus Outdoors, Land and Wave.
West Bay	Bluetits, West Bay Discovery Centre, West Bay Action Group.
Weymouth	Bluetits, Blueballs, Beach babes, Surf Life Saving Club, Veterans Hub Swimming, Black Pigs, Sea Cadets, Jurassic Swimmers.

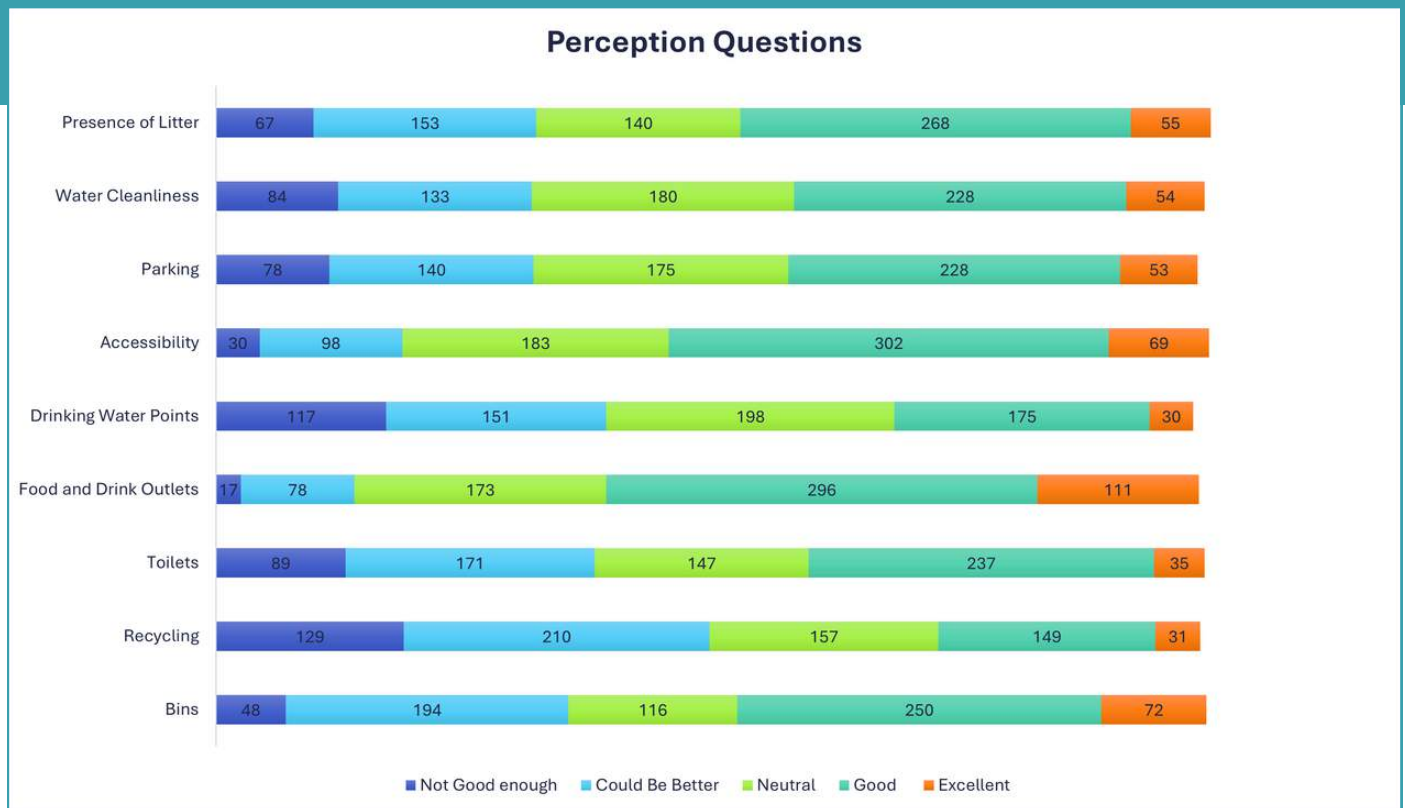


Figure 12: Bar chart which represents peoples perception on the environment and facilities

We asked a series of questions based on people perception of their most visited beach. The survey results indicate that food and drink outlets and accessibility received the highest satisfaction ratings, with many respondents rating them as “Good” or “Excellent.” Bins and the presence of litter also garnered positive feedback, suggesting effective waste management. However, areas such as recycling and drinking water points received significant “Could Be Better” and “Not Good Enough” responses, highlighting the need for improvement. Toilets and parking also showed room for enhancement based on the feedback. Water cleanliness received a mix of ratings, with a notable number of respondents rating it as “Good,” but also a significant portion indicating it “Could Be Better.”

We can analyse data for individual beaches to provide detailed feedback if necessary.

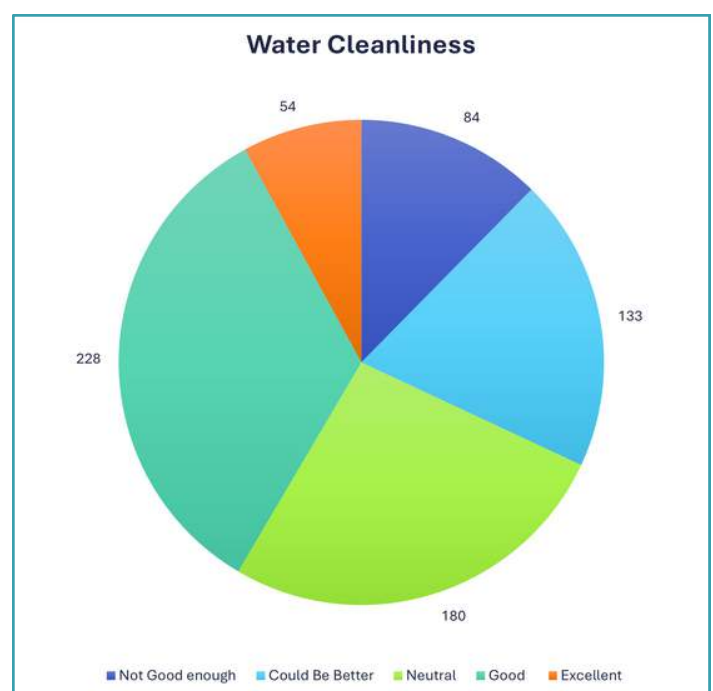


Figure 13: Pie chart representing peoples perception of water cleanliness

How often do you notice these types of litter?

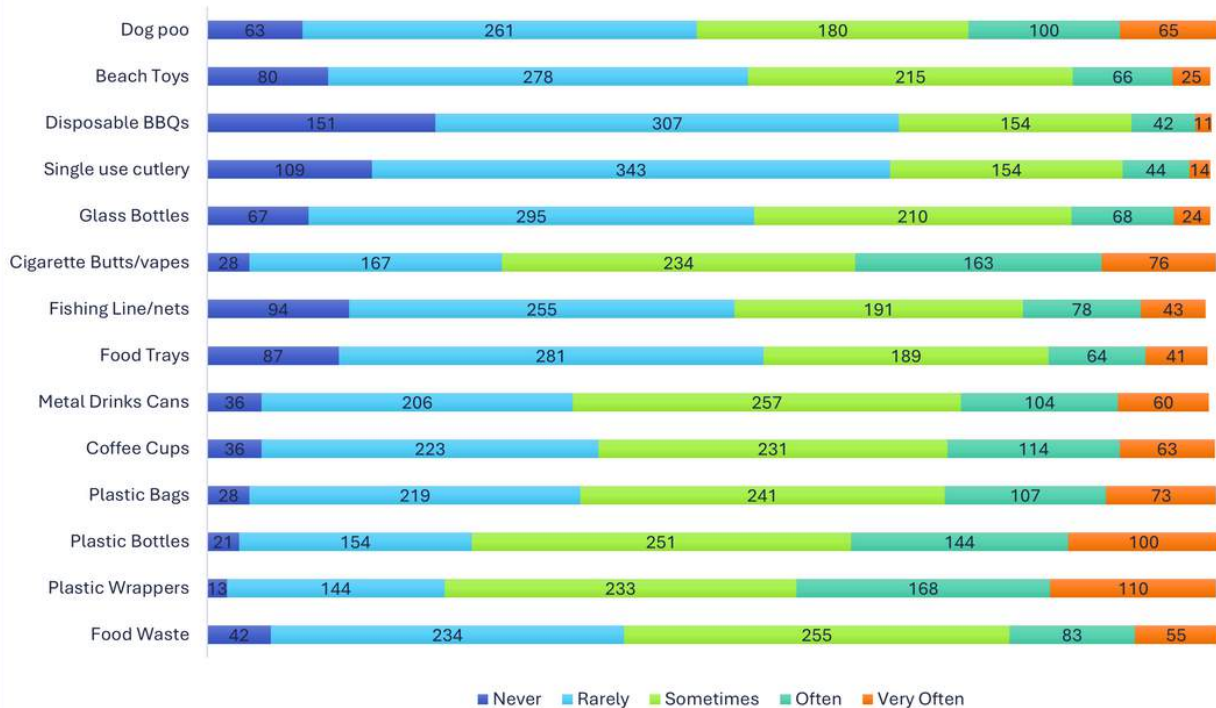


Figure 14: Bar chart which represents how often people notice types of litter

Plastic Wrappers and Bottles are the most frequently seen litter items, indicating a significant issue with plastic waste.

Cigarette Butts, Vapes and Dog Poo are also commonly seen, suggesting areas needing targeted clean-up efforts.

Items like Single Use Cutlery and Disposable BBQs are less frequently seen, indicating better management or lower usage.



Great Dorset Beach Clean
Group at Kimmeridge with Clean Jurassic Coast

CHECKING WATER QUALITY

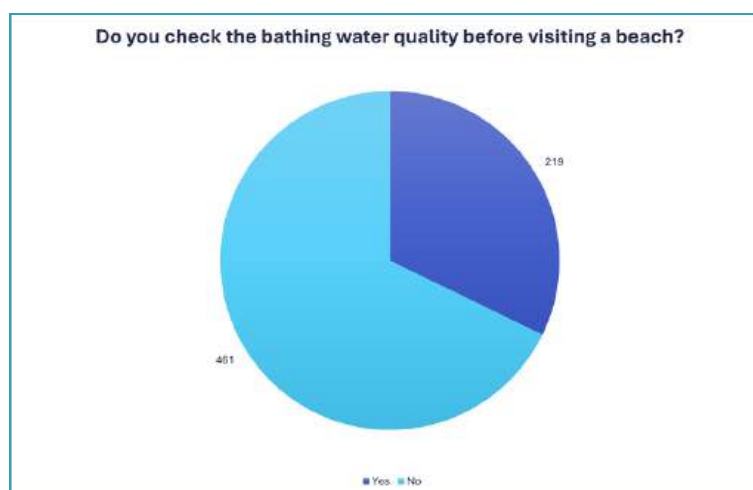


Figure 15: Pie chart which shows how many participants check water quality

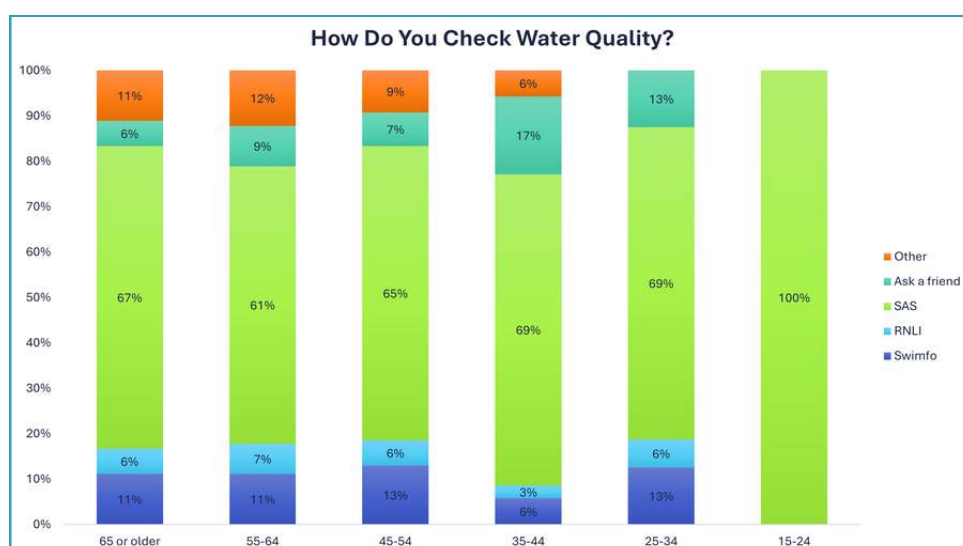
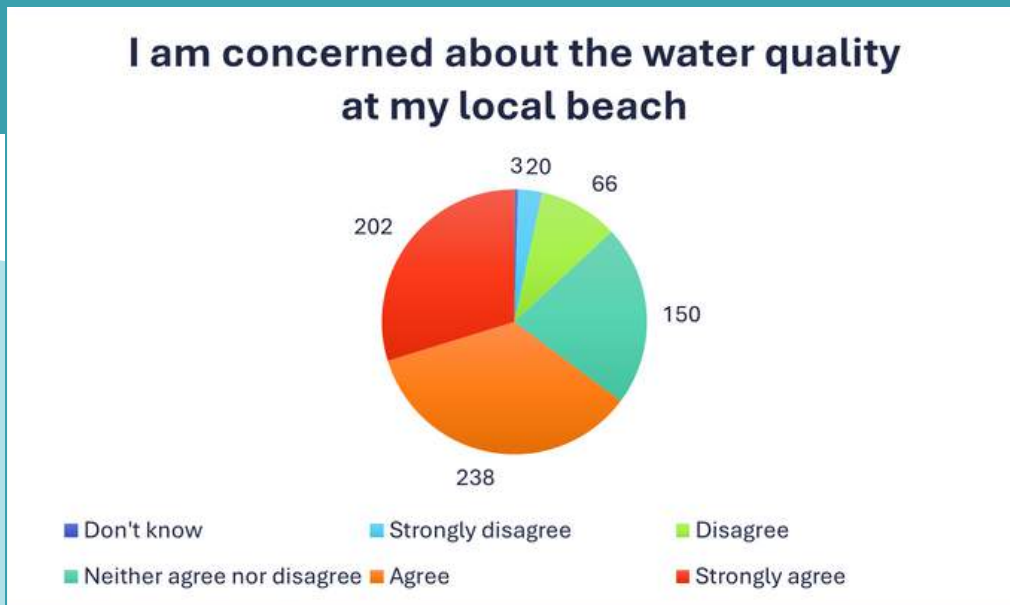


Figure 16: Bar chart which represents how people check water quality

A significant majority (461 respondents) do not check the bathing water quality before visiting the beach, indicating a potential area for increasing public awareness about water quality. Among those who do check, the SAS App is the most popular method (168 responses), followed by the Swimfo website and other methods (29 responses each). These other methods included the Wessex Water website (5), observations (4), Google (3), notice board (3) and local press (1).

WATER QUALITY CONCERN

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65%
of all beach users
expressed concern
about water quality

Figure 17: Pie chart which represents participants concern about water quality at their local beach

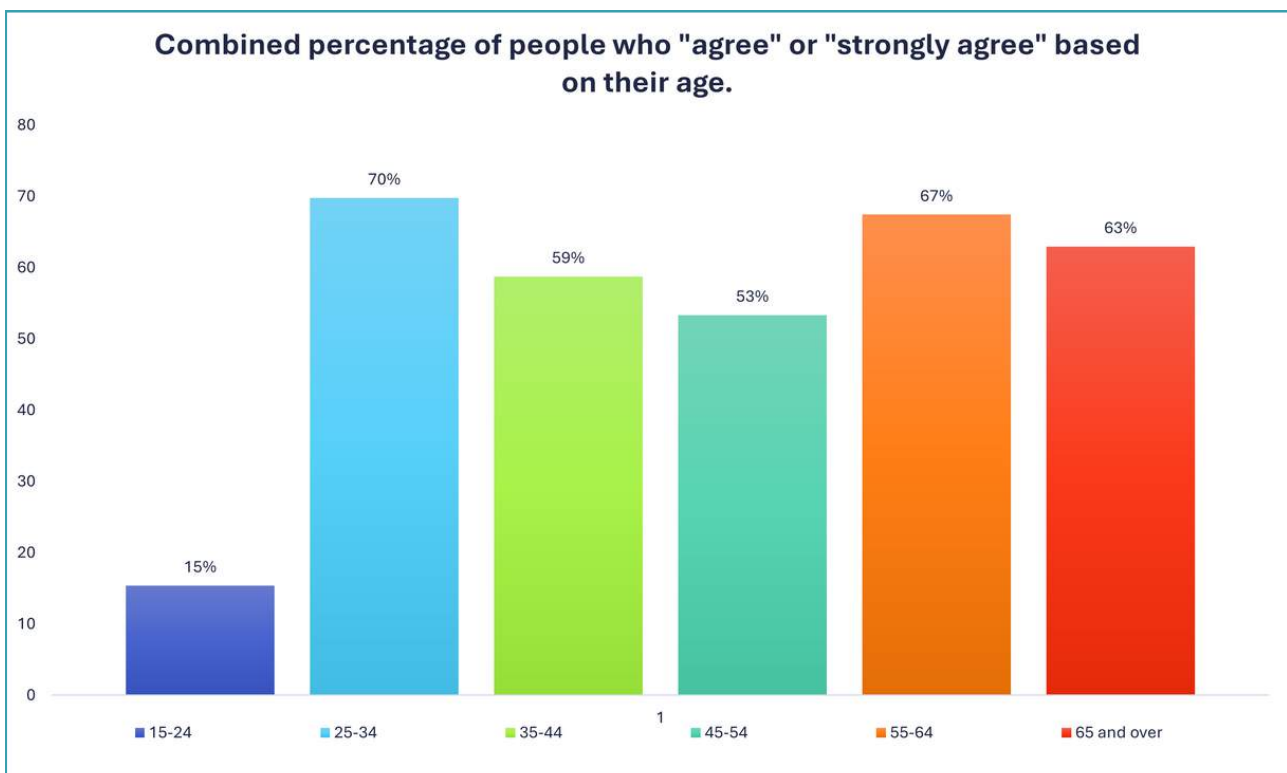


Figure 18: Bar chart which represents the age of participants who are concerned about water quality

The survey results indicate that a significant majority of respondents are concerned about the water quality at their local beach. Specifically, 238 respondents agreed and 202 strongly agreed with the statement, showing a high level of concern. A smaller group, 150 respondents, were neutral, neither agreeing nor disagreeing. Only a few respondents disagreed (66) or strongly disagreed (20) with the concern, and an even smaller number (3) were unsure. This data highlights a prevalent concern about water quality among beachgoers.

WATER QUALITY COMMENTS

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“

I have Kitesurfed and sailed here for years. I have only ever been sick from Mudeford quay this year.

Christchurch Avon Beach

”

“

Water quality is a huge issue. Twice the number of spills last year from the previous year is not acceptable, bathing water regulations and outdated. May-September does not represent how many regular dippers use the sea for recreation/mental wellbeing. The fact that water quality is not tested directly after a spill is scandalous. A blue flag status on 20 random samples over the summer is laughable.

Bournemouth Friars Cliff

”

“

Having lived around here all my life (78years) I think the beach is cleaner now than when I was young. Beach often had lots of tar and poo as the sewage pipes were not right out to sea and you could see sewage emptying into the sea.

Christchurch Highcliffe Castle

”

“

I have never seen sewage on the part of the Beach I visit regularly, I have lived here for 12 years and never seen sewage as of yet.

Weymouth Central

”

“

The quality of the water has been disgusting right through to the end of July this year, 2024.

West Bay

”

“

The water generally seems okay but after heavy rain I wouldn't go in. There is always toilet paper in the water

Studland

”

“

The only concern I have is water quality. It's is appalling that we live in an apparently developed country and yet when we use rivers and sea for activity we face catching waterborne infections from poorly managed sewage.

Bournemouth Southbourne

”

“

Water monitoring and information about the quality of the water should be available all year round. We use the water all year round and it is extremely important to understand if the water is not safe due to pollutants.

Weymouth Central

”

“

It would be great if it could be a designated bathing water as at the minute there is no way to check the water quality before swimming.

West Bexington

”

“

I and my friends find it disgusting that we sometimes can't swim because of a sewage discharge alert which seems to happen every time we have heavy rain. Why is the sewage system not being updated to accommodate all the new properties being built.

Swanage Central

”

“

I love the sea and I want it to be clean and healthy. So I would do something to help if I knew what to do

Swanage Central

”

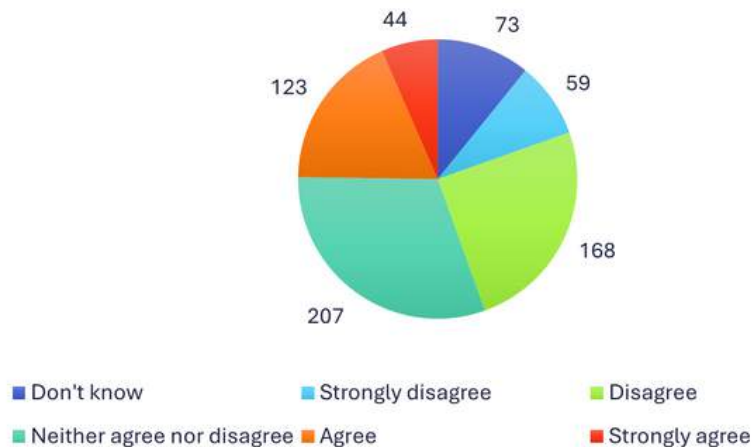
“

Possible grading of water signage ie green, amber, red or something like that to make swimmers aware.

Poole Branksome Chine

”

I know what actions I can take to improve water quality at the beach



76%

couldn't say they knew what actions they could take to improve water quality

Figure 19: Pie chart which represents whether participants know what actions they can take to improve water quality at the beach.

The survey results reveal several key insights regarding public awareness of actions to improve beach water quality. A significant portion of respondents (167 people) either agree or strongly agree that they know what actions to take. However, 207 respondents neither agree nor disagree, indicating some uncertainty or indifference. 237 people either disagree or strongly disagree, suggesting they are unsure or unaware of the actions they can take. Additionally, 73 respondents don't know what actions they can take, highlighting a potential area for educational outreach.

The actions we believe the public could take include picking up litter off the beach, not feeding the seagulls, and ensuring they pick up after their dogs. However, there is a concern that people might not have fully understood these were the types of actions we were considering. Instead, they might have imagined more significant actions, such as campaigning for change or speaking to local landowners.



ENGAGEMENT

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There were 12 different engagement events throughout the Summer. These included pop-up consultations at Christchurch, Swanage, West Bay and Weymouth as well as meeting swimming groups for early morning dips. We had nearly 300 in person interactions over Summer which helped promote the survey and discover where and when local swimming groups are entering the water. The survey was widely promoted through a variety of methods including a press release, social media, Dorset Coast Forum newsletter and the Dorset Council intranet.



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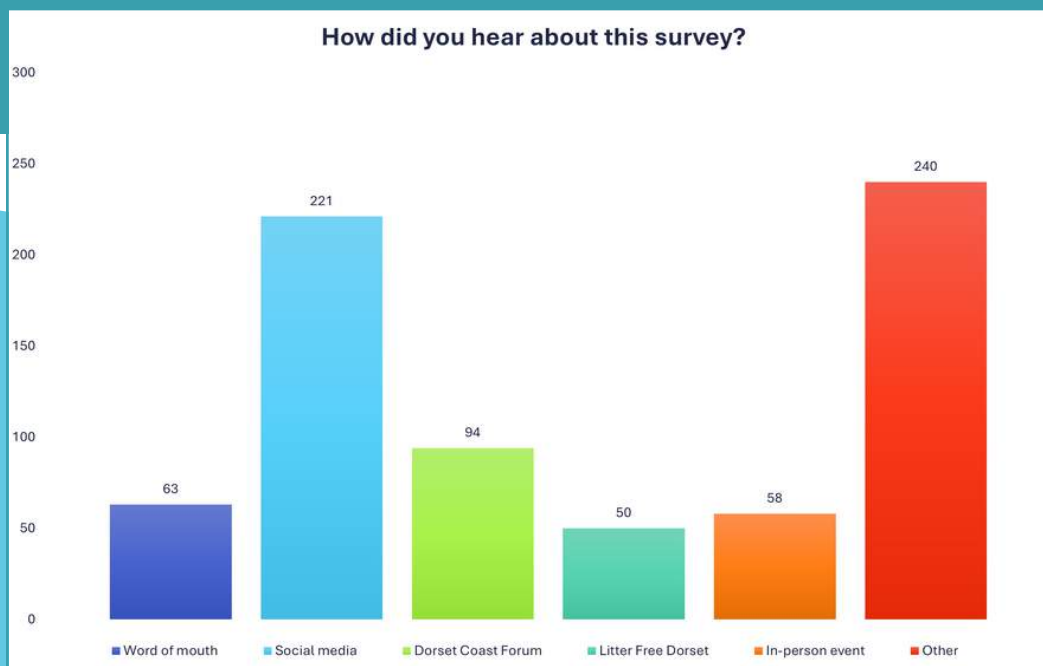
events

280

conversations

698

participants



31%
heard about the survey
through social media

Figure 20: Bar chart which represents how people heard about the survey



Figure 21: Word Cloud which represents “any other” ways people heard about the survey.



Example of a ‘reel’ on Instagram

Social media was the most effective channel, with 221 respondents hearing about the survey through this medium. The ‘Other’ category is the second-highest, with 240 responses. The word cloud above illustrates some of these channels. The data indicates that social media and email newsletters were the most effective in spreading the word about the survey. Traditional methods like word of mouth and specific forums also contributed significantly. While in-person events had a smaller impact on participation levels they gave us an opportunity to have in depth conversations and collect detailed information on specific beaches.

RECOMMENDATIONS

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These recommendations aim to improve beach conditions, address public concerns, and enhance the overall beach experience in Dorset.

- Increase public awareness about water quality and the importance of checking it before visiting the beach.
- Promote resources like the Swimfo website and new water quality apps.
- Implement targeted campaigns targeting plastic waste, cigarette butts, vapes, and dog poo.
- Monitor water quality throughout the year.
- Investigate the potential for designating frequently used undesignated beaches, especially those near water company assets.
- Continue engaging with community groups to understand their needs and promote beach activities that support mental well-being and social interactions.

THANK YOU,

LITTER FREE DORSET
DORSET COAST FORUM

