

Walsham le Willows Open Gardens 2025

Visitor Survey Analysis

106 surveys were completed and returned. This is double the amount from 2024. Based on the total number of visitors it is quite a small representative sample, however, any point raised is valid. It is not possible to work out a percentage using the gate money as this does not reflect village residents or those parking elsewhere, therefore, the percentage would not be representative.

It should be noted that not all visitors completed every question on the survey. Some surveys were anonymous.

Information gathered from the completed survey questionnaires is as follows:

3. Geographical range of visitors

Local towns and villages		
Bury St Edmunds	Thetford	Ipswich
Diss	Norwich	Brandon
Stowmarket	Lakenheath	Sudbury
Beccles	Attleborough	Ely
Colchester	Lowestoft	Barton Mills
Capel St Mary	Shimpling	Saxmundham
Great Barton	Elmswell	Badwell Ash
Barking	Long Thurlow	Bardwell
Ixworth	Wortham	Gislingham
Needham Market	Pakenham	Wetheringsett
Great Ashfield	Wickham Skeith	Barrow
From further afield		
Brighton	East London	Birmingham
Stevenage Herts	Somersham Cambs	Leicester
Kelvedon Essex	Sevenoaks Kent	
Mississippi USA	Beaulieu Hampshire	

A number of surveys were completed anonymously

2. Effectiveness of publicity

Eastern Daily Press 0	Road Signs 24	Car Club 1
Diss Express 0	Bury Free Press 0	Cambs Evening News 0
Posters 1	Local Radio 0	Internet 17
Evening Star 0	Word of mouth 27	Other 29
National Press 0	East Anglian 1	

The 'other' box indicated the following sources but only when visitors chose to elaborate:

- The Open Gardens website
- Pakenham Fox
- British Chelonia Group
- Open Gardens Directory
- Garden Club
- E.mail
- Facebook

Conclusion

- Road signs, word of mouth and the internet remain the most effective forms of publicity.
- We need to provide a box for visitors to elaborate on what 'Other' is in order to gain a full picture of effective publicity.
- Is advertising in publications paying off?

3. How many times have you visited this event?

Number of visits	Responses
1	28
2	20
3	5
4	6
5	3
6	6
6+	5

- More first-time visitors this year.

4 About the event

- 44 visited on the Sunday
- 44 visited on the Monday
- 16 people visited on both days.

Ratings

	Good	Average	Poor
Priory Room	67	2	0
Memorial Village Hall	85	1	1
BBQ and Pizza	33	2	0
Art in the Church	56	3	0
Flowers	63	4	0
Music in the Church	47	1	1

Bell Ringing Demonstrations	32	2	0
Bands	61	2	0
Walsham History Group	14	1	0
Village Market	39	9	2
Bus Service	41	4	2

Reasons given for average and poor ratings:

- Priory Room – would like mugs instead of cups, ran out of meringues
- MVH – cream sour, cookies sold last year not available this year.
- BBQ – too expensive for a charity event, more bar staff needed
- Art in the church – no reasons given
- Flowers – no reasons given
- Music in the church – clash between recital and bell ringing.
- Bell Ringing demonstration – no reasons given
- Bands – no reasons given
- Walsham History Group – no reasons given
- Village Market – ‘expensive’
- Bus Service – long waits, visitors missed visiting gardens because the bus didn’t come. caused problems for one disabled visitor. Didn’t always do a circular route but took the majority vote on where visitors wanted to go i.e. church and went straight there.

Conclusion

- The majority of our visitors have a very enjoyable visit and consider the attractions and entertainments that we offer to be of a good standard. This is confirmed by the number who make return visits and the many positive comments, particularly regarding the organisation and friendliness of people.
- Unfortunately, some of those who gave average or poor ratings (very few) did not elaborate, which is not very helpful to us.
- The bus continues to attract negative comments (see above) but positive ones as well.

About the gardens:

Number of gardens visited:

10 gardens +	29 (1 day only)
20 gardens +	39 (36 in one day, 3 over both days)
30 gardens	9 (6 in one day, 3 over both days)
30+ gardens	19 (13 in one day, 6 over both days)
All 44 gardens	1 (in 1 day)

41 people had enough time to see everything.

51 people did not have enough time to see everything.

14 people did not complete this section.

Taking this as a representative sample, this would mean that overall more visitors did not have enough time to see everything during the time they visited than in previous years.

The four favourite gardens were as follows:

Joint 1st

Garden 6 Peter and Henny Fenwick- Causeway House (the tortoises)

Garden 42 Kevin Boardley and John Ward Willow Cottage

2nd

Garden 39 Joe and Liz McCann, The Chestnuts

3rd

Garden 25 Jean and Del Davies Willow Tree Farm

Overall Summary

Positive comments

Overall visitors who completed the survey were very generous with their comments and praise for the event and all those involved, quoting community spirit, exceptional organisation, friendliness and lovely atmosphere. (See survey forms). The comments identified the strengths of this event as follows:.

Specific quotes;

“Always a joy to return to Walsham and the great sense of community”

“the food was amazing especially the pizza and the free bus came in handy after all that pizza and beer”

“well done to everyone for their hard work, we have been made to feel very welcome...thank you”

“I would love to come again and I very much enjoyed the Pimms”

“excellent event, very well organised and we would like to come every year if we can”

“what a lovely surprise, our first visit and it will not be our last...see you next year”

“there really is nothing to criticize or improve upon...everything is so perfectly thought out and every need catered for”

“each year the gardens get better and better... well done everyone and I look forward to coming next year”

“catering team are fantastic, lots of hard work and it's all delicious. Thank you”

“very well organised.. very impressed...very friendly and accommodating... very many thanks”

“food was excellent and thanks to everyone who worked so hard”

“outstanding organisation”

“the village hall tearoom was amazing we don't know how you do it”

“we visit many open gardens events but when it comes to organisation you are in a class of your own”

“a real village effort... see you next year”

“ what a fantastic experience... wonderful community spirit... we thoroughly enjoyed the day”

“our first visit and what a brilliant day we had.... food at no9 delicious such a treat to meet the tortoises.. a wonderful well organised event”

“organised like a military operation and we loved the traffic lights”

·”thank you to everyone involved ...your hard work and dedication is much appreciated”

“thank you to each and everyone that makes an event that we come to every year2

“thank you for a wonderful, quintessentially English day”

we loved today... we got lots of ideas and inspiration.. thank you”

“worked like a well-oiled machine.. W le W should be proud hosting such a great event”

“as first time visitors we were very impressed and well done to everyone who helped us to have a very enjoyable day”

“See you next year”.

Negative comments/suggestion

These seem to be isolated incidents and there was no general trend to follow.

- Comments made regarding why fruit left rotting on the allotments is not sold off to visitors.

- Change of venue for the Morris Dancers meant that some people missed them.
- More ladies toilets at the MVH? **There are 5 available ladies toilets at the MVH and at no time did I observe a queue.**
- Disappointed that the bell ringing and music in the church had finished by 5.30pm and that some of the artwork had been collected by the artists (2 comments)

Conclusion

From the sample of surveys completed:

- The most effective publicity remains the internet, road signs, word of mouth (reputation) and 'other', which needs a space to indicate what the other source was., so that we know where to target our publicity.
- The evaluation form needs redesigning as it is currently too long and some of the information asked for is not really relevant. A shorter simpler form may result in more being completed.
- The bus although praised also continues to attract negative comments about its reliability and the impact on the enjoyment of our visitors. Does the driver need more specific directives, such as how many circuits he should make an hour and what time he will take his break?
- The survey should include directions and parking facility comments.
- Possibly people do not have enough time to see everything on offer during their visit.
- Based on the sample of survey forms completed and the positive comments made our visitors had a really enjoyable day or two and many make return visits.

FJ (September 2025)