

Neath Abbey Community Research

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Neath Abbey Community Research 2022

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Views expressed in this report are those of the researcher and not necessarily those of the Welsh Government

Social research number - 76/2022.

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Glossary

Acronym/Key word	Definition
MDT	Monument Development Team
SRO	Senior Responsible Officer

1. Introduction/Background

- 1.1 Neath Abbey was established as a daughter house of Savigny in Normandy by Richard de Granville in 1130 and was absorbed into the Cistercian order seventeen years later, becoming a fairly wealthy house. In March 1539, the abbey was dissolved under Henry VIII and was destroyed piecemeal. Soon after, Richard Williams alias Cromwell took over the Abbey and the imposing Tudor mansion was built. In early 18th century, the Abbey grounds were given for industrial purposes. In the early 1920s, the Neath Abbey Research Party began a massive clearance operation. They removed some 4,000 tons of debris from the Abbey church alone and rescued the Abbey from the industrial waste that had buried it. The Abbey was placed in State care in 1944.
- 1.2 The Abbey sits between a railway track and a canal in the village of Neath Abbey, just outside of Neath. The Neath Abbey area is easily accessed via main transport routes, however the Abbey itself is situated towards the rear of an industrial estate with limited nearby facilities. The wider location is predominantly rural.
- 1.3 Neath Abbey is operated by Cadw as a free 'key-kept' site, open to the public between 10:00-16:00 daily.
- 1.4 The Abbey has received significant conservation investment in recent years, to ensure the site for future generations. The conservation was delivered over four phases with the final phase coming to an end in 2021. A Monument Development Team (MDT) was formed to ensure a holistic approach to developing the site and identifying both commercial and engagement opportunities. Several existing capital projects are due to end in 2022, providing an opportunity for the MDT to develop a proposal for improving the site further, using this current research as the basis for the rationale and decision making.

1.5 The scope of the current research is:

- To gather information about the local community's current usage and perception of Neath Abbey
- To gather information about the local community's thoughts around future uses and development of the site.
- To obtain a baseline on the impact of the monument and wider NPT historic environment on the well-being of the local community.

1.6 This report sets out the results of the survey, conclusions and recommendations. The survey questions can be found in Annex A.

2. Methodology

- 2.1 The research was carried out via a digital survey between 19 January 2022 and 21 February 2022.
- 2.2 The survey was promoted to people within a 10-mile radius of Neath Abbey (the village) on Cadw’s social media channels and shared by community stakeholders, including Neath Port Talbot Council. This was supported by physical marketing flyers distributed to local businesses to share with customers.
- 2.3 A Total of 1,083 surveys were completed. This compared to a target sample of 1,000.
- 2.4 The sample contained a spread of age groups; however, participation was low by those aged under 25 years (2%).
- 2.5 The sample contained 64% female responders, 35% male and 1% other, a skew towards female respondents when compared to the overall population.
- 2.6 97% participants were white, 1% (10) mixed/multiple ethnic groups, and 2% preferred not to say.
- 2.7 The occupation of participants is broken down as follows.

Occupation	Percent
Paid or self-employed	62%
Retired	23%
Unable to work	4%
Looking after home or family	4%
Students	2%
Other*	5%

Base – 1,083

** Includes on a government sponsored training scheme, doing unpaid work for a business that you or a relative owns, waiting to take up paid work already obtained, unemployed and looking for work, intending to look for work but prevented by temporary sickness or injury (28 days or less), doing something else and don't know.*

- 2.8 9% of participants were Cadw members, which is higher than the national average (1.6%).
- 2.9 The density of the home location of respondents was primarily Neath Abbey and the surrounding areas, with a slightly wider geographical spread than the 10-mile target area. This was due to the targeted Facebook posts picking up people's locations rather than home addresses, which resulted in the survey being seen by those working in, visiting, and travelling through the area. There were also a few outliers, which can be accounted for by participants being on holiday when the survey was advertised, or the survey being shared wider by those in the Neath Abbey area. However, only 5% of respondents lived outside of the wider Neath area.

Figure 1: Geographical spread of respondents



3. Findings

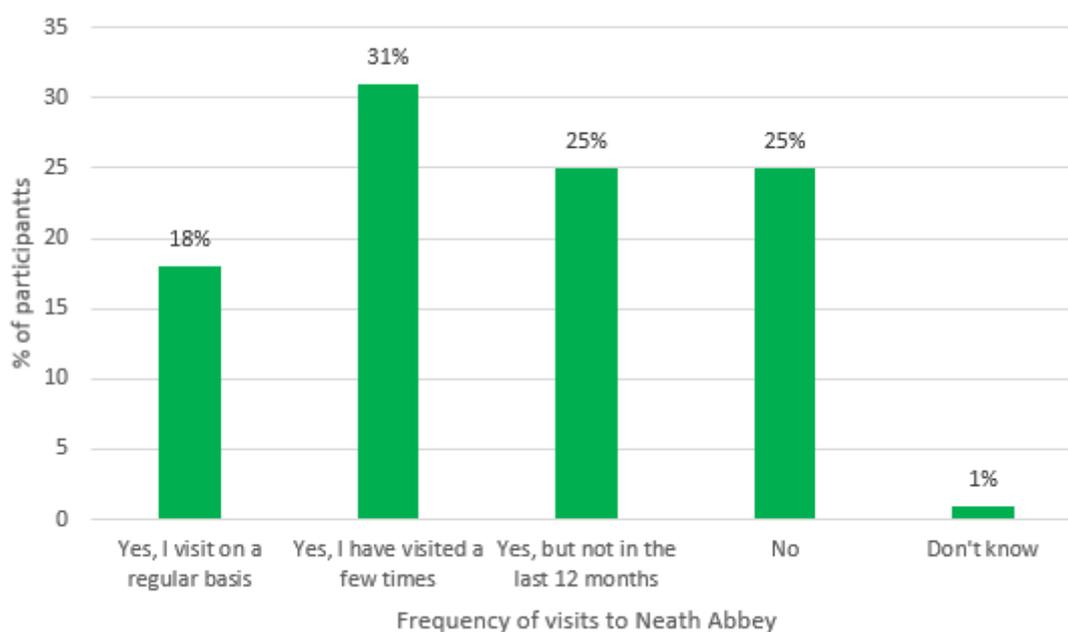
3.1 Frequency of visits:

Half of respondents had never (25%) visited Neath Abbey or had not visited in the last 12 months (25%). 18% of respondents visit regularly and 31% just a few times.

This compares to 23% of respondents for the 2019 National Survey for Wales having visited a historic place of worship within the previous 12 months. Covid-19 will have impacted the results of this research, with the start of the 12-month period seeing many people starting to return to days out in public places.

Have you visited Neath Abbey in the past 12 months?

Figure 2: How often participants have visited between January 2021 and February 2022



Base – 1,083

22% of participants reported that they visit regularly and will continue to do so, whilst 58% said they plan to visit again (this compares to 18% saying they currently visit regularly). Only 7% of participants said they have no plans to visit the Abbey.

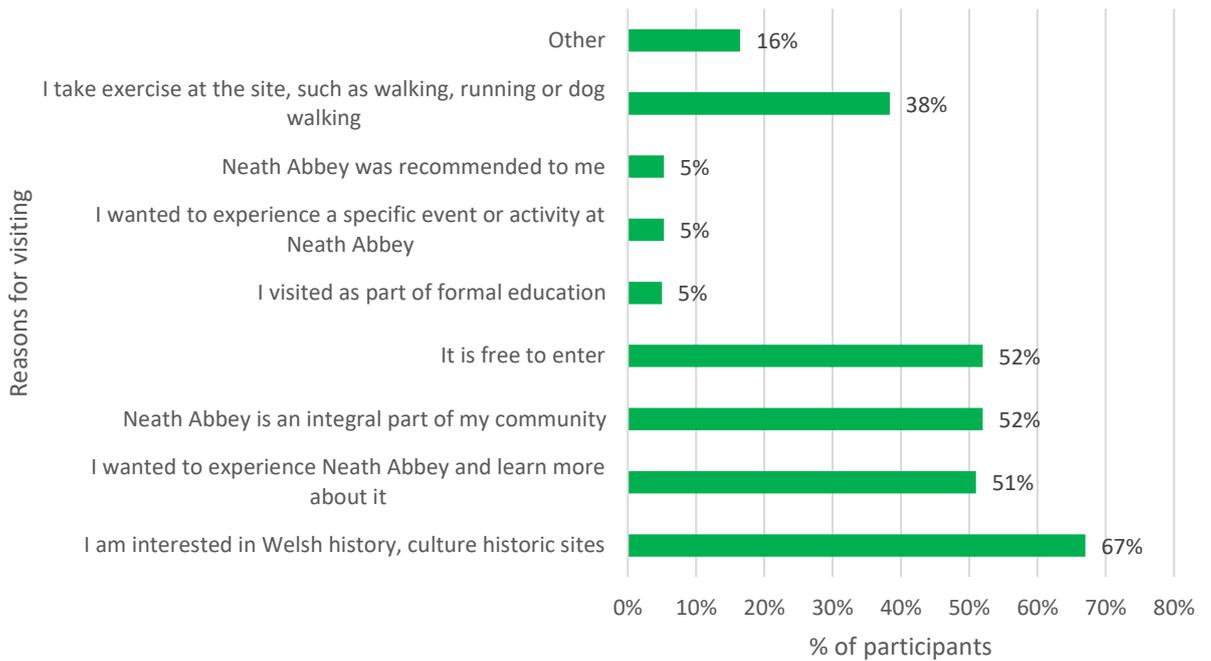
3.2 Why people visit:

When asked to tick all that apply, the primary reason for visiting is an interest in history, culture and historic sites (67%), followed by three equal reasons at 52% (wanted to experience Neath Abbey, Neath Abbey is an integral part of the community, it's free to enter).

When compared to the results from Cadw's visitor survey across all sites, a consistent 70% visited due to an interest in history and historic sites and 32% wanted to learn more about the site.

What are your reasons for visiting?

Figure 3: Reasons why people have visited Neath Abbey



Base – 1,083

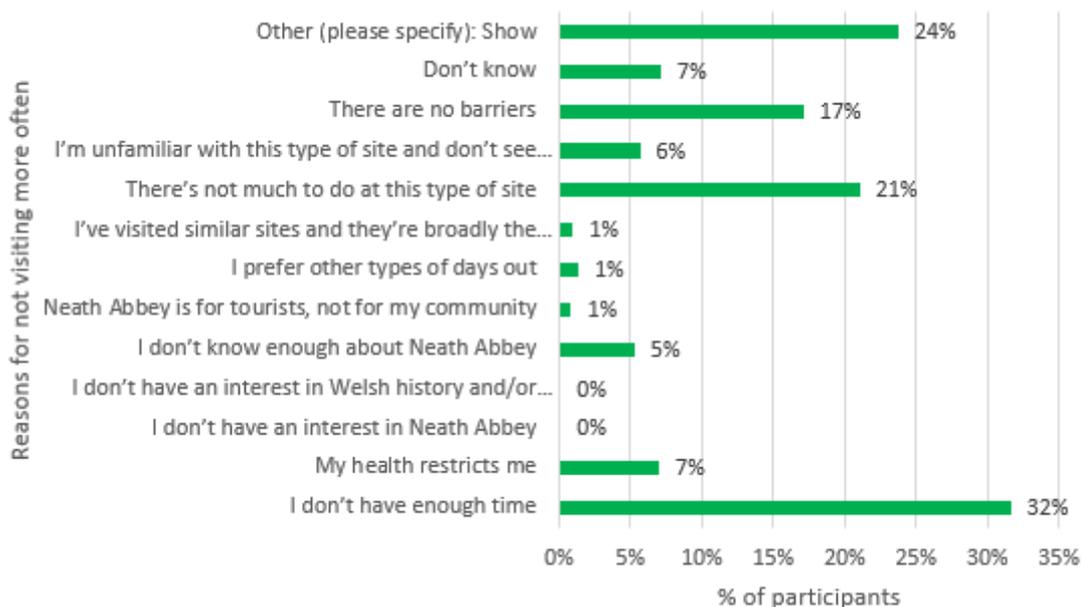
3.3 Barriers to visiting

3.3.1 The main reason why those who visit don't visit more often is not enough time (32%) followed by there's not much to do (21%). 'Other' reasons were varied, accounting for 24% and included:

- conservation works
- lack of facilities such as toilets and a café
- The pandemic (closed)
- always closed
- surrounding area unappealing
- evening antisocial behaviour
- better places to walk
- forget it is there

Are there any factors that stop you visiting more regularly?

Figure 4: Factors that stop people visiting more regularly



Base – 1,083

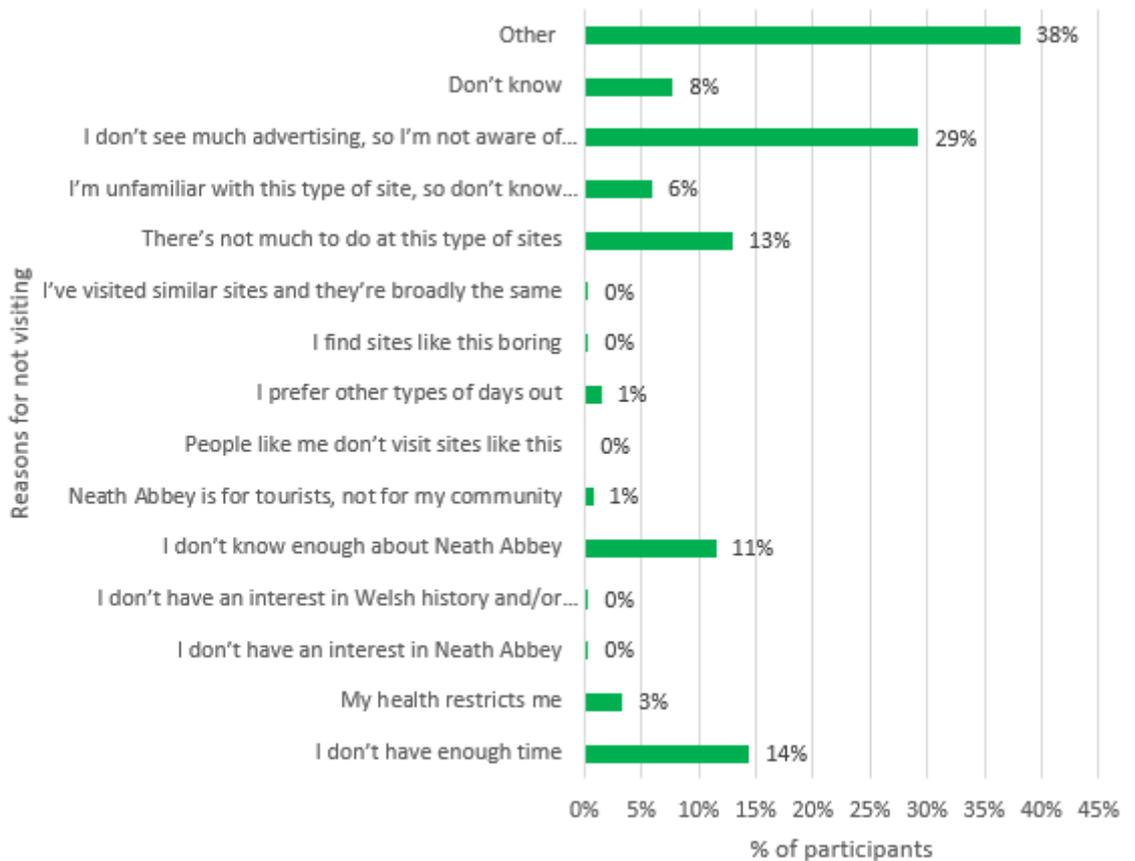
3.3.2 For those who haven't visited Neath Abbey, the main reason is lack of advertising (29%), followed by lack of time (14%), then there's not much to do at this type of site (13%).

Lack of advertising (29%) and I don't know enough about Neath Abbey (11%) suggest that people are unaware of the site or need to be reminded of it.

3% of people reported that their health isn't good enough to visit (and 7% of people who visit say health is a factor in not visiting more), compared to 18% in the National Survey.

Why have you not visited Neath Abbey?

Figure 5: Reasons for not visiting Neath Abbey



Base – 1,083

38% of respondents listed 'other' with reasons including the above, plus:

- I wish I had now you've mentioned it
- Didn't know it was there
- I keep meaning to but haven't yet
- I didn't know it was open to the public
- I don't like the location
- Covid-19
- Inaccessible for disabled people
- Waiting for the undercroft to re-open
- Gates always seem to be locked

Some comments include:

'I love this site but it's never open., never advertised, no visitor centre, no information, no advertising, no car parking.'

'Don't really think about it. Probably because it is close to home. Would like to see it properly and will endeavour to do so soon'

'I honestly didn't realise how big an area it covers and also how much of the building remains.'

'I forget that it's there and it's so isolated with nothing around it to attract people.'

3.3.3 Barriers by employment status:

32% of respondents said they do not visit more often due to time constraints. Of those saying they do not have enough time to visit, 67% were in paid employment and 21% retired.

The largest barrier to those who are retired are health restrictions (33%), followed by time (21%)

The largest barrier to those in paid employment is not enough advertising (23%), followed by time (12%), then there's not much to do (6%).

3.3.4 Barriers by age:

Similarly, to those who are retired, those over 65 don't visit because they don't see much advertising (29%), followed by not enough time (15%), then there's not much to do (8%).

Those aged 25-49 reported the largest barrier as lack of advertising (26%), followed by 'I don't know enough about the Abbey' (14%) and time (14%).

Other age groups follow this pattern, with the only exception being low cases of 'I am unfamiliar with this type of site' amongst the 45-54 year olds.

3.3.5 Barriers by gender:

Findings for male and female respondents were broadly the similar, however more males said that time was a barrier (14% compared to 10% for females).

3.4 Knowledge of the history and heritage of the area:

When asking how much respondents knew about the history and heritage of Neath Abbey and the surrounding area, the results were similar across their knowledge of the Abbey itself, the Neath valley area, and the wider Neath Port Talbot area, with 50-55% being somewhat aware of each. Between 5-7% had no awareness, 20-22% were very aware and 5% across all three were extremely aware. These results suggest that people are no more/less aware of the Abbey than they are the heritage in the surrounding area. Participants between 35-54 years old were most aware across each area.

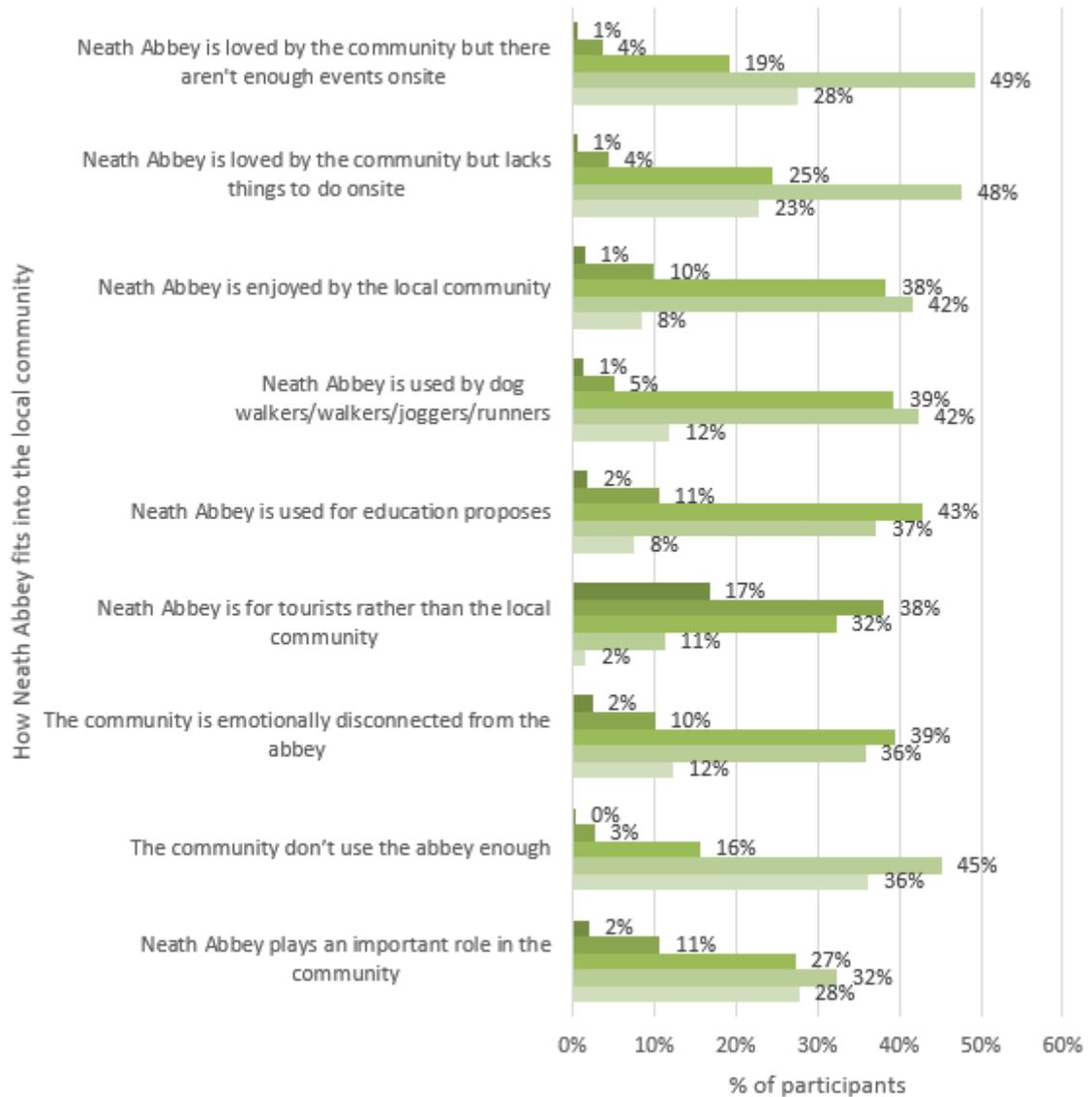
3.5 How does the Abbey fit into the local community?

- 81% of respondents agreed that the community don't use the Abbey enough (3% disagreed) and 12% agreed that the community is emotionally disconnected from the Abbey.
- However, 60% of people agree or strongly agree that the Abbey plays an important role in the community (with 13% disagreeing or strongly disagreeing) and 50% agreed the Abbey is enjoyed by locals (while 11% disagreed).

- 13% agreed that the Abbey is just for tourists, whilst 55% disagreed. In a later question, 81% of respondents said they would like it to be developed as a tourist attraction.
- Most people didn't know whether the Abbey is used for educational purposes, but 44% thought it was and 13% didn't.
- 54% agreed the site is used by dog walkers, runners etc. (while 6% disagreed).
- 69% agreed that the Abbey is loved but lacks things to do, while only 5% disagreed. Similarly, 77% said there aren't enough events (4% disagreed).

How do you feel Neath Abbey fits into the local community?

Figure 6: Participant perception of how the Abbey fits into the local community



Base – 1,083

3.6 Development as a tourist attraction:

81% of respondents thought the Abbey should be developed as a tourist attraction, 4% said they didn't and 14% responded 'other' or don't know. These findings are consistent across demographic groups, and across motivations for visiting and frequency of visits.

3.7 Future uses of Neath Abbey

Respondents were asked to explain how they would like Neath Abbey to be used by the community in the future. Comments included:

'Maybe some picnic benches. It's a great place for kids to run around, climb, read. Kids react more if they are doing things so the climbing is great and they love it.'

'Could be linked with other sites in the Neath and Port Talbot area. i.e. Cefn Coed Colliery museum, Aberdulais falls, Margam Abbey etc. More publicity is required for this site and more grants.'

'Remain as it is. Needs a better car park and maybe a bit more to do on site - even a small shop'

'Historic talks, guided tours, food festival, Easter hunts, pop up outdoor cinema.'

'A community centre onsite for diverse demographic groups to use would connect the community back with the Abbey. Groups could incorporate and foster a passion for local history, conversation and preservation and archaeology through activities, events and just being close to the site. The site needs to be accessible to those with learning and physical disabilities. All of this would also help encourage tourists to visit the site as well.'

'Make the immediate area around the Abbey a nicer place to be. Improve the canal walk ways. Deal with the fly tipping and rubbish in the surrounding roads.'

Popular words include:

- Event (344), event (18)
- Education/al (68), Schools (35), school (26)
- Café (39), food (29)
- Concerts (39)
- Music (38)
- Craft (29)
- Theatre (27), plays (17), cinema (16)
- Shop (26)

- Fairs (25), festival/s (36), fetes (17)
- Talks (24)
- Parking (20)
- Access (17)

3.8 Linking heritage participation and wellbeing

The results of the current survey show no direct correlation between well being and visiting Neath Abbey within the past 12 months, however the data provides a baseline for future data collection in the Neath Abbey area and for comparison against other communities.

4. Conclusions and Recommendations

4.1 The proportion of people who plan to visit Neath Abbey in the next 12 months is higher than those who have visited in the past, suggesting a lack of awareness or the need for a reminder about the Abbey. More marketing of the Abbey would have a positive impact on visitor numbers and community engagement to keep the Abbey in people's minds. The location of the Abbey means it's not as visible to people travelling through the area or the community during their daily activities.

4.2 The reasons that people visit Neath Abbey fall broadly in line with the reasons for visiting other Cadw monuments and have the same level of priority, suggesting that proximity to the monument may not be an important factor.

The 2019 Wales Visitor survey found that most participants visiting heritage sites were interested in castles/historic sites and Welsh culture / history. The proportion who stated these primary motivations for visiting Neath Abbey were lower, but this may be due to the high number of people who use (also use) the site for recreational activities and this survey samples local population rather than tourists.

The main reason why those who do visit don't visit more often, and the second most frequent reason by those who have not visited, is not enough time. Lack of time to visit heritage sites is also a significant factor identified in other research undertaken by Cadw, such as the National Survey for Wales and the Wales Visitor Survey. Whilst lack of time to visit heritage is a hard barrier for Cadw to influence, ways of increasing heritage as a priority could be explored for Neath Abbey, such as increased community engagement to ensure people feel a sense of ownership over the site. 15% of retired people did not have enough time to visit, showing that time is also a factor for those who have retired from working.

4.3 The second most prevalent reason for people not visiting more often (and third amongst those who haven't visited) is the perception that there's not much to do onsite. Without further investigation it is unclear as to whether this is a perception based on the idea of what heritage sites have to offer or whether this is based on having visited recently and feeling that there would be no need to return. Cadw could look to increase the number of permanent or temporary (such as events)

things to do onsite, but also increase communications around existing onsite activities.

For those who haven't visited Neath Abbey in the past 12 months the main reason was lack of advertising, with comments including 'I forgot it was there' and 'I don't remember to visit'. Lack of advertising being the main reason people don't visit, but not a factor in those who visit not visiting more regularly, shows that a lack of awareness of the site is having an impact on visitor figures, whether this is because they don't know about Neath Abbey or they simply forgot about it.

Participants were asked to 'tick all that apply' when asked why they don't visit or don't visit more often. Options with a low number of responses were:

- lack of interest in Neath Abbey or Welsh history/culture
- the Abbey being for tourists and not locals
- having visited other similar sites and they're all pretty much the same
- preferring other types of days out

4.4 A very small number of those who say they would visit more often reported that their health isn't good enough. This number was low compared to results for the National Survey, suggesting that the communities around Neath Abbey are in better than average health and/or that the site is more accessible to people with health issues than the perceived 'average' heritage site (e.g. a castle with many towers).

4.5 When asked how much respondents knew about the history and heritage of Neath Abbey, the Neath Valley and Neath Port Talbot, results were consistently low across the three, with around half of respondents reporting that they are somewhat aware. Given the rich and diverse heritage in the area there is an opportunity to promote its heritage assets to more people on a more regular basis; not just by Cadw but by other heritage organisations too.

4.6 Results for how the Abbey fits into the community shows a feeling by some that there is an emotional disconnection between the community and the Abbey, with high frequency of responses for 'it doesn't play an important role in the community' and 'the community don't use it enough'. This suggests that there is plenty of scope to work with the community to improve the sense of ownership and overall usage of

the monument. Analysis of the qualitative responses showed a lack of usable toilets and other conveniences (benches, café, and shop) are a barrier for community use, such as the inability for schools to visits due to the limited toilet facilities.

Participants also asked for tours, live music, theatre and cinema experiences, fairs/fetes, food festivals, historical re-enactments, children's activities and crafts, and more school visits. The feeling that there's a lack of things to do at the site was also strong for this question.

When asked how they would like Neath Abbey to be used by the community in the future the responses reflected the qualitative responses received above, with events being most important. This suggest that the community primarily see a range of events as the way for the community to engage with the site in the future. This would of course encourage repeat visits by those who feel that there isn't much to do onsite. References to schools and education, and lack of facilities were also mentioned again.

- 4.7 Cadw members are slightly more likely to visit Neath Abbey frequently. This supports the findings around a lack of awareness through marketing and communications – whilst Cadw members do not receive more advertising of the Abbey itself (other than receiving the South Wales touring map) they do receive more information about historic sites in Wales and are perhaps therefore more 'switched-on' to heritage.
- 4.8 Most respondents agree that the Abbey could be developed as a tourist attraction, which suggests the community are proud of the site and want more people to experience it and/or they understand the economic benefits of bringing more tourism to the area.
- 4.9 The current research is a pilot survey on community engagement to provide evidence to the Neath Abbey MDT. This evidence ensures decision making around future development of the Abbey considers the community's feedback. This research can be repeated in the future to evaluate the impact of any interventions and developments.

Annex A:

Questionnaire:

Introduction:

Cadw regularly assesses the potential impact of its sites on the local community, the people of Wales and visitors. As part of this work we would be interested to hear your views on potential future uses for Neath Abbey.

Historic sites in Wales have the potential to improve well-being and engage positively with the communities they are located in as well as attracting visitors and delivering benefits to the economy. Your views are essential in ensuring all opportunities are considered as part of any potential future developments at Cadw sites and Neath Abbey in particular.

The survey takes 3-7 minutes to complete, and to thank you for your time we will enter you into a prize draw to win one of three Cadw memberships (or renewal if you are already a member).

Diolch yn Fawr

Cadw

1. Have you visited Neath Abbey in the past 12 months?

Yes, I visit on a regular basis

Yes, I have visited a few times

Yes, I have visited once or twice

Yes, but not in the last 12 months

No, I haven't

Don't know

2. What were your reasons for visiting? (tick all that apply)

I am interested in Welsh history, culture historic sites

I wanted to experience Neath Abbey and learn more about it

Neath Abbey is an integral part of my community

It is free to enter

I visited as part of formal education

I wanted to experience a specific event or activity at Neath Abbey

Neath Abbey was recommended to me

I take exercise as the site, such as walking, running or dog walking

Other (please specify):

3. Are there any reasons for you not to visit more regularly?

I don't have enough time

My health restricts me

I don't have an interest in Neath Abbey

I don't have an interest in Welsh history and/or culture

I don't know enough about Neath Abbey

Neath Abbey is for tourists, not for my community

I prefer other types of days out

I've visited similar sites and they're broadly the same

There's not much to do at this type of site

I'm unfamiliar with this type of site and don't see much advertising of the Abbey

There are no barriers

Don't know

Other (please specify):

4. Why have you never visited Neath Abbey?

I don't have enough time

My health restricts me

I don't have an interest in Neath Abbey

I don't have an interest in Welsh history and/or culture

I don't know enough about Neath Abbey

Neath Abbey is for tourists, not for my community

People like me don't visit sites like this

I prefer other types of days out

I find sites like this boring

I've visited similar sites and they're broadly the same

There's not much to do at this type of sites

I'm unfamiliar with this type of site, so don't know what to expect

I don't see much advertising, so I'm not aware of the site and its features, or reminded about it

Don't know

Other (please specify):

5. Will you be visiting Neath Abbey in the next 12 months?

Yes, I visit regularly and plan to continue doing so

Yes, I am likely to visit again

I have no plans to visit again

Don't know

6. How much do you know about the history and heritage of Neath Abbey and the surrounding area (not aware – very aware)?

Neath Abbey

Neath Valley

Neath Port Talbot

7. How do you feel Neath Abbey fits into the local community (strongly agree – strongly disagree)?

Neath Abbey plays an important role in the community

The community don't use the Abbey enough

The community is emotionally disconnected from the Abbey

Neath Abbey is for tourists rather than the local community

Neath Abbey is used for education purposes

Neath Abbey is used by dog walkers/walkers/joggers/runners

Neath Abbey is enjoyed by the local community

Neath Abbey is loved by the community but lacks things to do onsite

Neath Abbey is loved by the community but there aren't enough events onsite

Would you like to expand on any of the above answers?

8. How would you like Neath Abbey to be used by the community in future?

(free text answer)

9 Do you think Neath Abbey should be developed as a tourist attraction to attract people into the area?

Yes

No

Don't know

Other (please specify):

A bit about you, how you interact with heritage and your well-being

9. Thinking about Wales as a whole, how do historic buildings in Wales feature in your life?

I visit historic monuments as a leisure activity on day trips from home

I visit historic monuments as a leisure activity whilst on holiday

I visit historic monuments through work

I visit historic monuments through volunteering

I visit historic monuments as part of everyday activity e.g. exercise or dog walking

I engage online with the historic environment, such as the Cadw website, app or social media

I take part in education activities related to the historic environment

10. How often have you visited any historic monument in Wales in the last 12 months?

Not at all

Once or twice

3-4 times

5-11 times
12-24 times
24-49 times
50 plus times

11. How often have you visited a historic site in Neath Port Talbot in the last 12 months?

Not at all
Once or twice
3-4 times
5-11 times
12-24 times
24-49 times
50 plus times

12. How does engaging with the Historic Environment benefit you? I benefit by ...

Learning more about history, culture and heritage
Feeling inspired by the historic environment
Feeling like I'm doing my bit to protect the historic environment
Feeling a sense of ownership over my local heritage sites
Feeling like part a community and connecting with other residents
Spending time with family and friends when visiting historic monuments
Sharing my knowledge with other people
A greater feeling of happiness and well-being

13. Do you agree with the below statements (strongly agree – strongly disagree)?

I'm satisfied with my life nowadays
Things I do in my life are worthwhile
I felt happy yesterday
I felt anxious yesterday

14 Age
Under 18

19-24 years

25-34 years

35-44 years

45-54 years

55-59 years

60-64 years

65+ years

15 How do you identify?

Female

Male

Non-binary

Other

Let me type

16 Ethnic identity

White

Mixed/Multiple ethnic groups

Asian/Asian British

African

Caribbean/Black

Arab

Prefer not to say

Other ethnic group:

17. Thinking about your work situation, what you were doing in the last 7 days?

Full-time student (including on holiday)

In any paid employment or self-employment (or away temporarily e.g., on leave, off sick, self-isolating)

On a government sponsored training scheme

Doing unpaid work for a business that you or a relative owns

Waiting to take up paid work already obtained

Unemployed and looking for work

Intending to look for work but prevented by temporary sickness or injury (28 days or less)

Unable to work because of long-term sickness or disability

Retired

Looking after home or family

Doing something else

Don't know

17 Cadw member

Yes

No

Don't know

18 Post code of place of residence

20. Please enter your email address below to be entered into the prize draw to win one of three Cadw memberships (or renewal if you are already a member). We will not use your email address for any other purpose other than to inform you if you are one of our lucky winners.

End text:

You have completed this survey!

Thank you for taking the time to answer this survey.

If you have opted to leave your email address you will be entered into a prize draw to win one of three Cadw memberships (or renewals). The draw will take place on XXXX, and you will be contacted by email shortly after if you are one of our winners. (T&Cs)

To view the findings of this report and for up-to-date information about Neath Abbey, please visit the Cadw website