



Moorlands PSPO Consultation 2026

Findings by Consultation & Engagement Team

April 2026

1. Background and methodology

Wildfires occur regularly on moorland in Greater Manchester, including around Bolton, and can have major economic impacts due to the cost of controlling them, lost income from tourism, damage to farmland and the impact on local businesses. In addition, they can also destroy precious habitats, plants and animals, cause significant air and water pollution, release large amounts of greenhouse gases, and have a huge impact on residents and communities. It has been identified that most wildfires are caused by human activity, which can tie up huge resources for extended periods.

At the height of the moorland fires in 2018, 220 firefighters, 100 soldiers, 57 fire engines and a helicopter were in operation across Greater Manchester.

To reduce the risk of wildfires, Bolton Council have been coordinating an approach which would propose the renewal of a Public Space Protection Order (PSPO) on moorlands around the borough. Neighbouring councils, that are responsible for adjoining areas of moorland, (Chorley and Blackburn with Darwen Councils) are also exploring similar proposals, following a previous consultation in 2022 that lead all three authorities to implement a PSPO.

If the PSPO proposal is implemented, anyone found using prohibited items that cause wildfires would face a fine of up £1,000. If approved, the restrictions would only apply to land to which the public have access to, the proposals would not apply to private properties.

Between 9th March and 20th April 2026, the Council ran a public consultation, seeking to engage residents and stakeholders that have an interest in the proposed Restricted Area, in sharing their reflections on wildfire risk and their views on the PSPO. During that period, a comprehensive communication plan was implemented to raise awareness of the proposal across the borough, with a strong emphasis on engaging visitors at moorland sites through field surveys at Walker Fold.

During the consultation, posters were circulated on social media and at key sites across the site location. A coordinated approach to the consultation was taken from Bolton Council, Blackburn with Darwen Council, and Chorley Council, with the same consultation questions and consultation period being utilised for each authority's consultation. Supporting documentation was made accessible on the Council's consultation webpages and social media was heavily utilised throughout the period to share key messages about the consultation. The consultation appeared in the local media outlet, [The Bolton News](#). An afternoon of field surveying was also coordinated by the consultation team to capture the views of stakeholders visiting Walker Fold Car Park, a site within the Restricted Area, which provides visitors with access to moorland walks.

Participants were surveyed using a questionnaire tool made up of open and closed questions, over a period of six weeks, providing respondents the opportunity to reflect and share their thoughts on the proposal.

The questionnaire was made available online, with the questionnaire being accessible on the council's consultation web page, as well as in hard copy and alternative formats upon request.

A copy of the questionnaire is included at the end of this document, located in Appendix A.

Analysis notes

- Results are presented in the questionnaire format with 'Don't know' type responses removed unless stated.
- Comments have been categorised where feasible. Unless otherwise stated, categories with four or more responses are shown. Categories may overlap and a comment from one respondent included in multiple categories. A sample of comments [verbatim] are included in the report. Comments may be abbreviated so that only the relevant extract is included. One comment may be coded into multiple categories, and each category may only cover a certain aspect of the comment, for example a respondent may have made both positive and negative comments about the same aspect.
- Base: unless otherwise stated the base is the number of respondents to a particular question.
- Data has been cleansed where appropriate, e.g., comments moved into existing responses.

2. Consultation responses

A number of open-ended questions were included in the questionnaire to give respondents the opportunity to comment on the proposal, suggest alternative approaches to the proposed PSPO and outline the support needed if the proposal was approved.

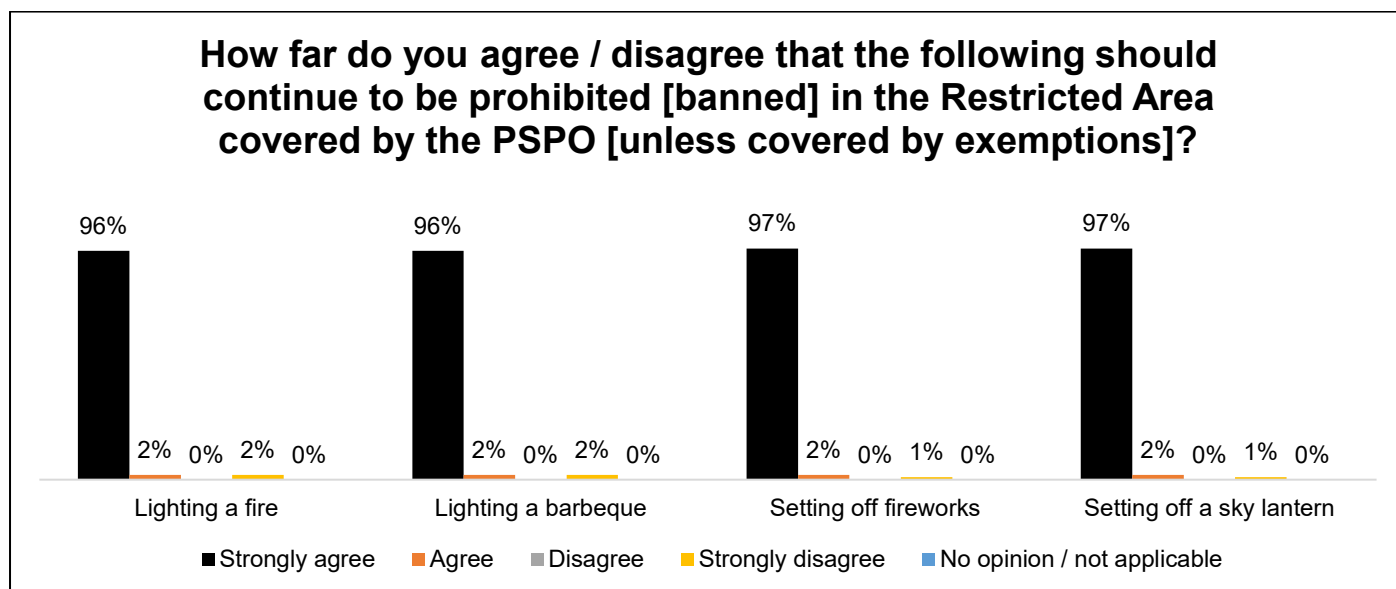
Throughout the consultation period, 264 responses were received from the survey about the proposed PSPO, five were other interests or formal responses, including from Natural England and a member of Bolton Mountain Rescue. Other interests included residents living near the restricted area: *"Live in Egerton, can see all the moorland from house."* A farm owner and the founder of the *"Horwich clean up brigade"* also responded to the consultation. In addition, a separate consultation response was received from the Woodland Trust, Smithills Estate, who support the renewal of the PSPO (refer to Appendix B).

The response rate for Chorley Council was 71 responses, and Blackburn with Darwen Council received 89 responses. The overall agreement for the proposed introduction of the PSPO was 96.7% in Blackburn with Darwen, and in Chorley Council's consultation, there was 100% agreement. The overall agreement for the PSPO in Bolton was 99%, revealing a similar level of agreement across all three authorities.

3. Prohibited items

Respondents were asked how far they agreed or disagreed with a prohibition being implemented to curtail activities that could lead to a wildfire, including lighting a BBQ and setting off Chinese lanterns and fireworks.

An average of 260 respondents strongly agreed that a ban should be imposed within the Restricted Area covered by the proposed PSPO. There was a consistent level of agreement that the following activities should continue to be prohibited in the Restricted Area covered by the PSPO. Two comments were received that agreed with the PSPO: *“There shouldnt be any open flames, people are idiots.”* ; *“littering, vandalism. Danger to life”*.



Base average: 260

3a. Reasons for disagreement

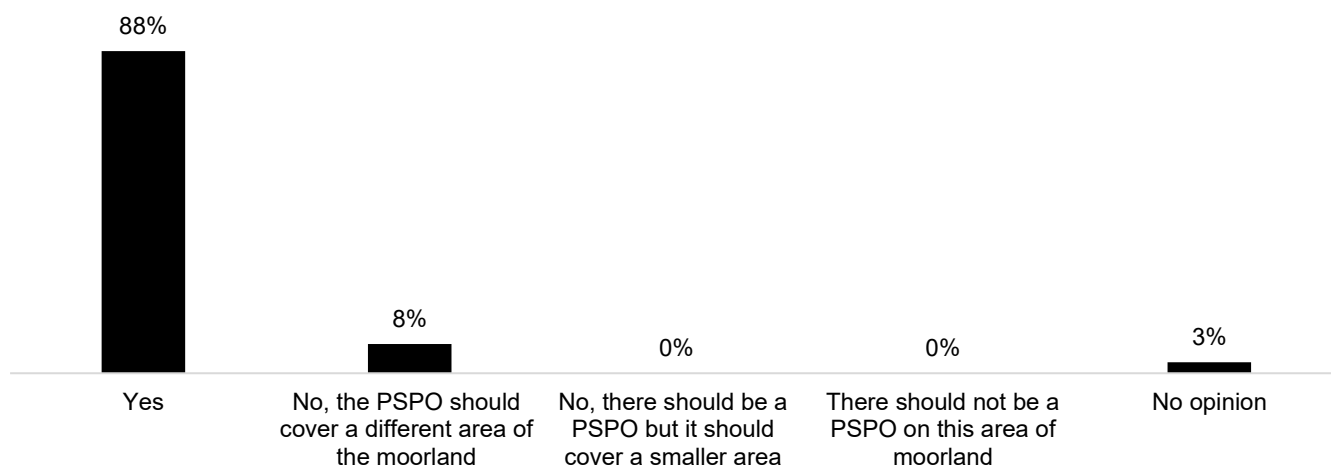
Two people provided comments to elaborate on their disagreement:

- *“BbQ as long as controlled in z designated area where it's safe like in Spain”*
- *“Why should sensible people be punished for having enjoyment whilst camping or hiking because of a minority of idiots? Also note that the irresponsible idiots won't care about any PSPO anyway and will do as they already do, ie what they want, when they want.”*

4. Restricted Area

Respondents were asked to review the proposed area, which consists of Smithills Moor, Horrocks Moor in the East, Walker Fold in the South and Wilder's Moor in the West. 88% of respondents agreed that the Restricted Area covers the right area of moorland, though 8% thought that a different part of the moorlands should be covered. In the previous consultation on the PSPO in 2022, 47% agreed with the Restricted Area coverage, while 52% thought that it should be expanded to cover different areas.

Does the Restricted Area cover the right area of moorland?



Base: 260

Respondents were invited to expand on their answer by suggesting areas for the PSPO to cover. Of the 260 responses received in the previous question, 28 elaborated. These comments were themed into four themes. The findings follow similar themes from the previous consultation in 2022, though there were less respondents discussing the need, or lack of need, for the PSPO.

Please say which area should be covered by Bolton Council's PSPO.

Rank	Category	Number of respondents
a.	Larger area – general	17
b.	Larger area – specific	9
c.	Larger area – neighbouring authorities / areas outside of Bolton	8
d.	Other green spaces	4

a. Larger area – general

17 comments provided general comments that the proposed Restricted Area for the PSPO should be expanded.

- *"It should be extended to cover much wider area of moorland"*
- *"It should cover the entire moor."*
- *"As much as possible. Fires in the moors are dangerous and irresponsible"*
- *"The red line boundary doesn't look like it's covering enough of the moorland."*

b. Larger – specific

Nine comments provided comments about expanding the Restricted Area to specific sites within the Bolton borough, including Matchmoor Lane to Barrow Bridge, Horwich Moor and the Horrocks Wood car park.

- *"Should include the area from Walker Fold down to Barrow Bridge, to include Twitchells field."*

- *“The Horrocks Wood car park owned by the forestry commission should be covered due to the amount of fireworks and Chinese lanterns let off from here that come up over the moor. Not to mention the amount of bonfires that are set on the car park that can easily spread. With it just being across the road from the moors I believe it should be included.”*
- *“Include all as now but also from Matchmoor Lane to Barrow Bridge.”*
- *“Should also cover Horwich moor”*

c. Larger area – neighbouring authorities / areas outside of Bolton

Eight comments suggesting expanding the PSPO to neighbouring authorities, including areas that fall under Chorley Council and Blackburn with Darwen Council. Rivington Moor and Winter Hill were common points of reference.

- *“The area should also include Rivington Moor - not sure if this comes under Chorley”*
- *“It should cover Rivington pike and the Chinese gardens and all of rivington especuallly down near the Liverpool castle”*
- *“The whole moor should be covered including Rivington Moor and Folds Pasture”*
- *“It needs to be bigger: it should include all this AND the moorland on Cheetham Close and the woods around Cox Green Road and Jumbles. The adjacent moorland around Turton Heights and Entwistle Reservoir under Blackburn with Darwen Council should also be included.”*

d. Other green spaces

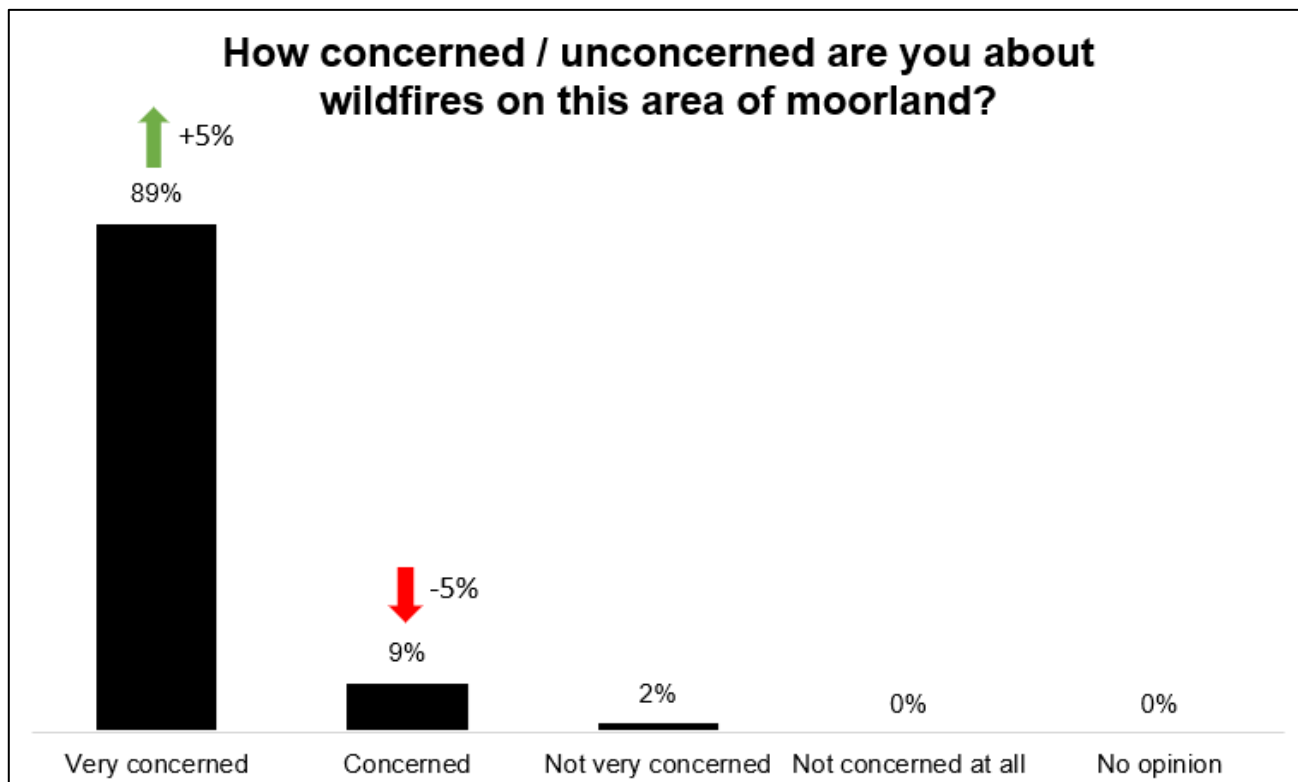
Four respondents suggested that other green spaces should be included within the PSPO:

- *“Should extend to open country further south as well as the area indicated”*
- *“All green spaces should be covered”*
- *“Should include more green spaces”*

Other comments included one concern that the respondent did not know the area well enough to comment and *“Back in the day farmers used to do controlled burns to regenerate the moor land for grazing. That seemed to work”*.

5. Level of concern about wildfires

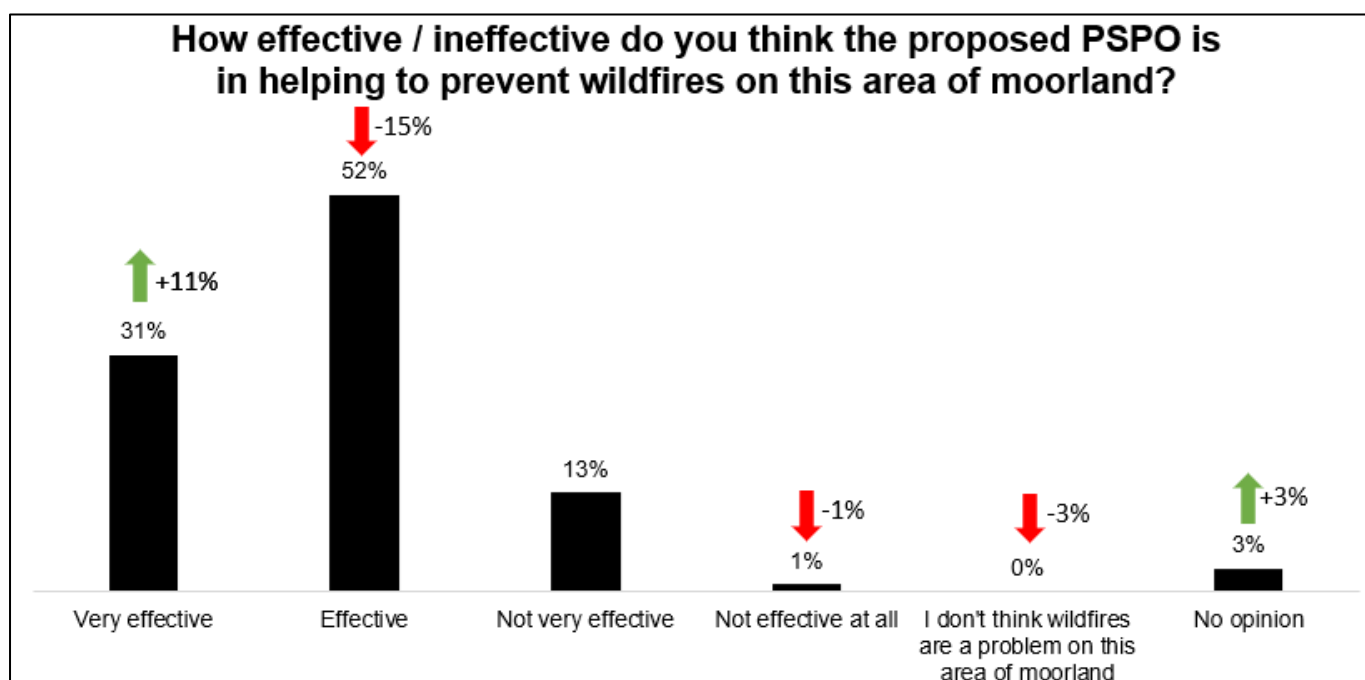
Respondents were asked to outline how concerned they are about wildfires on moorland within the Restricted Area. 264 responses were received. 98% of respondents stated they were concerned about wildfires, with 2% stating they are *“not very concerned”*. Compared to the previous PSPO consultation, there was a slight increase in level of concern from respondents.



Base: 264

6. Perception of the effectiveness of the proposed PSPO

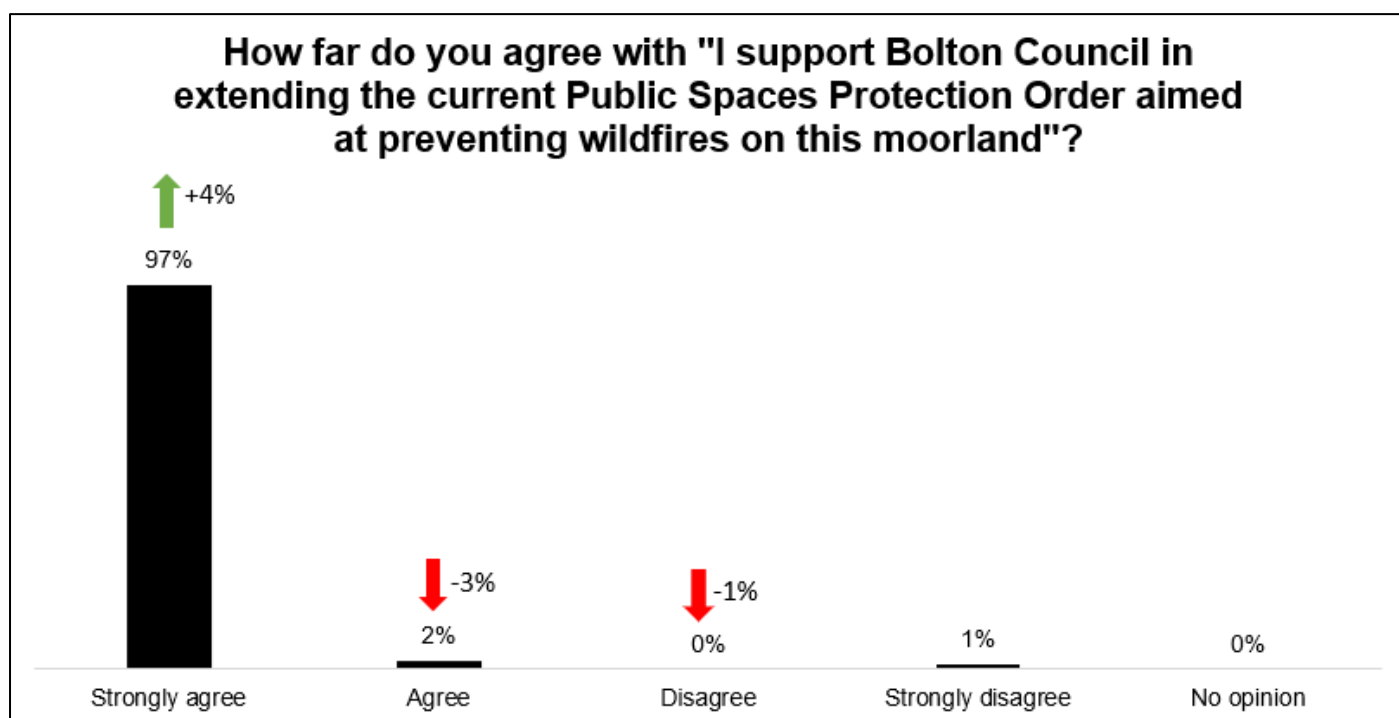
Respondents were then asked how effective they think the proposed PSPO will be in helping to prevent wildfires in the proposed Restricted Area. 84% of respondents think the proposed PSPO will be effective at preventing wildfires, while 13% think that it will be “*not very effective*”. No respondents thought wildfires are not a problem in Bolton.



Base: 263

7. Overall views on the PSPO

Finally, respondents were asked to share their overall views on the PSPO by outlining their level of agreement for the extension of the current PSPO. 263 respondents provided their views, revealing that 99% agree with the proposal to extend the PSPO. 1% of respondents strongly disagreed with the proposal.



Base: 263

8. Further comments

Respondents were asked to provide further comments about the proposal. 95 comments were received, which were categorised into eight themes. Respondents took the time to outline the importance of enforcement and preventative measures against wildfires alongside the proposed re-introduction of the PSPO, and some relayed their appreciation for the natural landscape and threat of wildfires. Several discussed the extent of the proposed Restricted Area and the need for fire wardens and rangers. A minority discussed the restrictions proposed and suggested having designated barbeque sites, and some mentioned the reporting system. Themes were similar to the previous consultation where enforcement and support for the PSPO were commonly raised.

Please use this space if you'd like to make any comments about this proposal, or for any alternative suggestions.

Rank	Category	Number of respondents
a.	Impact of PSPO - enforcement	30
b.	Impact of PSPO - general support for PSPO / appreciation of moors	29
c.	PSPO Size	27

d.	Preventative measures - education and campaigns	17
e.	Wildfires - impact and response	12
f.	Fire wardens / rangers	10
g.	Restrictions / designated BBQ sites	8
h.	Reporting	5

a. Impact of PSPO – enforcement

30 comments discussed the level of impact the proposed PSPO may have on the risk of wildfires and the protection of the moors, with the majority mentioning enforcement may be a key influence on the effectiveness of the proposed PSPO. Several discussed the importance of enforcing so the PSPO is not an “empty threat”, while others focused on the fines needing to be “stricter” and “much higher” to act as a deterrent. Some respondents suggested interventions for enforcement such as using drones during Bank Holidays and at hotspots, adding CCTV cameras, and improving police presence.

- *“U need people to police and enforce it in my walks around Rivington i have never seen anyone doing this, and if u tackle people who are using bbqs etc you get abuse back.”*
- *“Those who respect the area treat it very well and follow the rules. Anyone who doesn't care about the rules will ignore what is prohibited and light bonfires/barbeques and set off fires regardless and there needs to be harsher penalties for those caught doing so.”*
- *“As a fire patroller, the signs and info have been essential in showing how the restrictions are enforced.”*
- *“If someone is stupid enough to set any sort of fire, they should be charged and convicted to the full extent of the law”*
- *“It is very important for the PSPO to remain in place. However, it is not very effective without sufficient enforcement. More work needs to be done to improve enforcement of the PSPO, with clear communication as to who is responsible for enforcing and how they will be empowered to do so, so that breaches can be dealt with and act as an effective deterrent to any potential breaches*
- *“The area itself needs more police presence due to antisocial behaviour.”*
- *“Need to ensure enforcement action is taken when required and not just having the PSPO as an empty threat.”*
- *“Fines for breaking rules need to be much higher as currently they are not working as a deterrent”*
- *“Stricter fines. CCTV on roads in area.”*
- *“Drones should be deployed at Hotspots and on Public Holidays throughout the Spring and Summer”*
- *“Unless there is regular, visible policing, the Order will have little effect. Fly tipping is illegal and yet the West Pennine Moors are a dumping ground for example.”*
- *“Unfortunately, actions like these that prohibit this dangerous practices are needed as deterrents to safeguard our local environment and wildlife.”*

An official response from Natural England was received, which focused on enforcement being a deterrent and the need for partnership working:

“I am the Natural England Higher Officer responsible for the protection and enhancement of the West Pennine Moors SSSI. Natural England fully supports the extension of the current PSPO, as this has been effective already in reducing the incidence and scale of any wildfires that have occurred in recent years. We support the extension because wildfires are still occurring; we know of a least 4 larger fires from 2025. The PSPO, its signage and the potential for enforcement may not stop someone determined to break the terms

of the PSPO and deliberately start a fire but it likely deters a lot of uninformed behaviour (such as BBQs, sky lanterns, camp fires and even smoking). Natural England do also support the effective enforcement of the PSPO and in the event of an extension we would, therefore, ask the local authorities to consider how this can be best achieved with other partner organisations. Thank you again for all your hard work on preparing and implementing this PSPO.”

b. Impact of PSPO – general support for PSPO / appreciation of moors

29 respondents shared general support for the proposed PSPO and the PSPO that was implemented previously, many of whom also shared appreciation for the moors and the natural landscape. Several shared personal accounts about their experiences living near, visiting and volunteering at the moors.

- *“I support this proposal and the continued education regarding the dangers and impacts of wild fires. We have lived in the Burnt Edge area for six years and have seen improvements in behaviour and attitude towards safeguarding our moors and the wildlife they support.”*
- *“As a fire warden for one of the key stakeholders I have seen the impact of not having preventative measures and powers in place. The PSPO helps enormously in aiding those concerned to protect the environment as well as the communities associated with the moorland.”*
- *“As someone who was born and brought up in the Turton area, I feel quite protective towards our beautiful moors and they should be protected at all costs.”*
- *“Living facing the moors and having seen what happened last time, the PSPO should be permanent and should be extended to cover the moors towards Blackburn, Darwen and Chorley as well as what is covered now.”*
- *“As someone who has grown fond of hiking in recent years (including several visits to the moorland in question in recent years) i think we need need this order in place - in fact i have a strong desire for other authorities across the country to bring in similar orders, so it is great to see Bolton, Chorley & Blackburn with Darwen setting the standard that should be more widespread - to summarise i very strongly support the order”*

Other respondents focused on the impact on wildfire risk and subsequent benefits of the proposed PSPO for wildlife and carbon storage. Some suggested further protection measures such as planting peatland, banning sky lanterns entirely and making the PSPO “permanent”.

- *“The measures have been successful in helping to avoid a repeat of the devastating fires in 2018. Please keep them in place.”*
- *“Please keep all restrictions in place that protect our moorlands, their carbon stores, and their dependent wildlife, from catastrophic fires.”*
- *“I think it is common sense that no fires should be allowed on Moors”*
- *“Extending the PSPO is vital. It should be made permanent.”*
- *“It is important to keep the PSPO in place to help prevent more fires which cause extensive damage to the local moors, the lives and habitats of birds and mammals are destroyed and peoples health and livelihoods at also damaged, not to mention the demand on the local fire and rescue services.”*
- *“Ban sky lanterns everywhere”*
- *“Completely support, need to protect our moorlands from wildfires at all costs. Whilst you’re up there, please plant more peatland!”*

c. PSPO size

27 respondents discussed the extent of the proposed PSPO, where an overwhelming number of respondents raised the area should be extended into other areas, including “country parks / reservoirs”,

and “vulnerable moorland and woodland”. Several mentioned extending the PSPO across other local authorities. Some respondents were unaware of the consultations across Chorley Council and Blackburn with Darwen Council, or suggested extending the PSPO to areas outside of the Bolton borough.

- *“Consideration should be made into extended it to other green spaces of significant interest (country parks / reservoirs).”*
- *“I would like the area where fires are prohibited be made much larger!”*
- *“The area around Lower Deakins Farm, Lower Tongs and around Barrow Bridge at the start of 63 steps should be added to the existing area”*
- *“I think it covers the right area but I think the PSPO could be extended to cover even more vulnerable moorland and woodland.”*
- *“I think the area shld be extended towards noon hill area . I think all our moors shld be protected for the sake of the wildlife”*
- *“I would like the PSPO to be extended to cover additional moorland bordering the Smithills estate. This should include land extending to Belmont road and towards Rivington Pike and beyond.”*
- *“Maybe extend the area and create designated areas for bbqs”*

Extend across authorities:

- *“I think a stronger message could be made if the whole moorland areas in the Chorley, Blackburn and Bolton were covered by a single PSPO.”*
- *“The entire moorland across this area should be protected noting parts fall into Chorley & Darwin’s the appropriate Councils should promote the safeguarding together and fund countryside rangers to ensure compliance.”*
- *“I think the area should be extended to Rivington moor and the whole area around there is no need to have bbqs or any other fire in those area and the risk us to great to the area”*
- *“I also think that Chorley Council should survey the people of Chorley over the rest of the Rivington, as that is an extremely large area that could, potentially, be at risk of fire”*
- *“It should be all moorland, we get a lot of people having barbecues and leaving all their rubbish at Stonesbank in Egerton.”*

d. Preventative measures – education and campaigns

17 comments raised the importance of preventative measures to support with the proposed re-introduction of the PSPO to further reduce the risk of wildfires. Several raised that education plays an important role, and campaigns could be implemented to increase awareness and work with local communities. One noted the need for cross-authority collaboration, given that the proposed PSPO is also being considered by Chorley Council and Blackburn with Darwen Council. A response from a fire marshal was received, stating the need to educate the public about illegal activities on the Restricted Areas.

- *“More signs with no fires/barbecues”*
- *“Publicise that people can apply for permission for a specific reason to set off lanterns and how they go about doing so.”*
- *“Education therefore also needs improving.”*
- *“More preventative measures such as rebuilding of stone walls to act as a barrier as well as the introduction of bore holes that could be used in times of drought to create wet spots that will prevent fires.”*
- *“Increase awareness in no more fire campaigns to Bolton public and work with landowners.”*
- *“Prevention around litter is also important and controlled burning. Education campaigns needed.”*
- *“Further prevention needed to prevent young people doing wildfires up Rimington after work in the summer.”*

- *“There needs to be tri-borough wide public information campaign with posters in public spaces, using advertising boards and outreach in schools and colleges.”*
- *“As a WT fire marshall, I feel more signage and publicity should be used to educate those regularly going up, especially around the 'hidden resevoir', much of the public are unaware its illegal and a PSPO is in place”*

e. Wildfires – impact and response

12 people raised further comments about wildfires, noting suggestions for wildfire response, their personal experiences with wildfires and their general concerns about the impact of wildfires on wildlife, local communities and fire services. One respondent queried what data is available about the cause of wildfires.

- *“Under ground water tanks at different place could be installed at very vulnerable points and used for a quick response.”*
- *“Fires spread quickly destroying flora ,fauna,domestic property and but hopefully not people.The manpower needed to control fire is enormous .The cost is staggering .The recovery time can be decades.”*
- *“We know what happened in 2018. We need to prevent such devastation”*
- *“Looking back to the devastating fire pre-covid which did so much destruction to the moors and wildlife, we don't ever want that repeated. It tied up so many firefighters and has taken years to recover. We still see such fires in other parts of the country each summer, in areas not covered by such an order as Bolton. It is vital that our Bolton order is extended. There are still many clueless people around and our volunteer fire watchers do an amazing job and are to be congratulated.”*
- *“I have a nephew who is a fireman and I do not like him risking his life because people like careless fires”*
- *“I volunteered during the last big fire and to see the damage close up and the fires still flaring up is frightening. The wildlife is still recovering after several years and this must not be allowed to happen again. Ever.”*
- *“I live just off Belmont Road near Horrocks Fold and have seen the devastation the fires have caused in the past and totally support the proposal extend the protection order.”*
- *“Do Bolton Council have any data from the fire service as to the cause of these fires and what caused them. Can we learn from e.g. other countries I.e.Portugal France Spain who regularly have summer fires.”*

f. Fire wardens / rangers

10 respondents suggested that fire wardens and rangers are necessary to ensure the PSPO is enforced and to monitor offences. Several discussed that these could be voluntary or seasonal positions.

- *“There are no rangers or anyone monitoring offences, it is still useful to prohibit but in reality only allows retrospective prosecution which still needed and acts as deterrent but does little in way of prevention”*
- *“A seasonal paid fire Warden”*
- *“I think the protection order is the best option there is, short of regular patrols.”*
- *“Consider recruiting voluntary 'fire wardens' who regularly walk the moors anyway to report suspicious activity, liaise with rangers and the fire service. The Woodland Trust implemented something similar at Smithills last year, and it worked well.”*
- *“There should be wardens patrolling the moors in the spring/summer and anyone caught with bbq's, fireworks, chinese lanterns, should be heavily fined to cover the cost of the patrols and the devastation”*
- *“The full moorland needs better protection from the public at certain times of the year. Volunteer Rangers and Fire fighters might work, these could work in shifts. as long as they fit the bill after training they could be most helpful.”*

g. Restrictions / designated BBQ sites

Eight respondents raised that the PSPO does not go far enough and raised suggestions for further restrictions, with several focusing on disposable barbecues and restricting the sale of prohibited items. One respondent raised that controlled burning could be consulted on, while another suggested exempting camping stoves from the PSPO or that there is a designated barbecue site.

- *“Access should be limited to pathways only, this will help in some recovery.”*
- *“However I also believe that there needs to be some consultation and consideration of controlled burning taking place in specific areas.”*
- *“All fire inducing equipment taken onto land should be banned”*
- *“People should also not sell simple foil tray barbecues which are the most dangerous”*
- *“Ban the sale of disposable barbecue in shops, also ban the sale of Chinese lanterns, restrict sale of fireworks to November slot 3 to 5 November”*
- *“I would explore exempting camping stoves from the ban, as they are designed to keep heat of the ground and to turn off, rather than continuing as a heat source in direct contact with the ground after use like a fire or bbq”*

h. Reporting

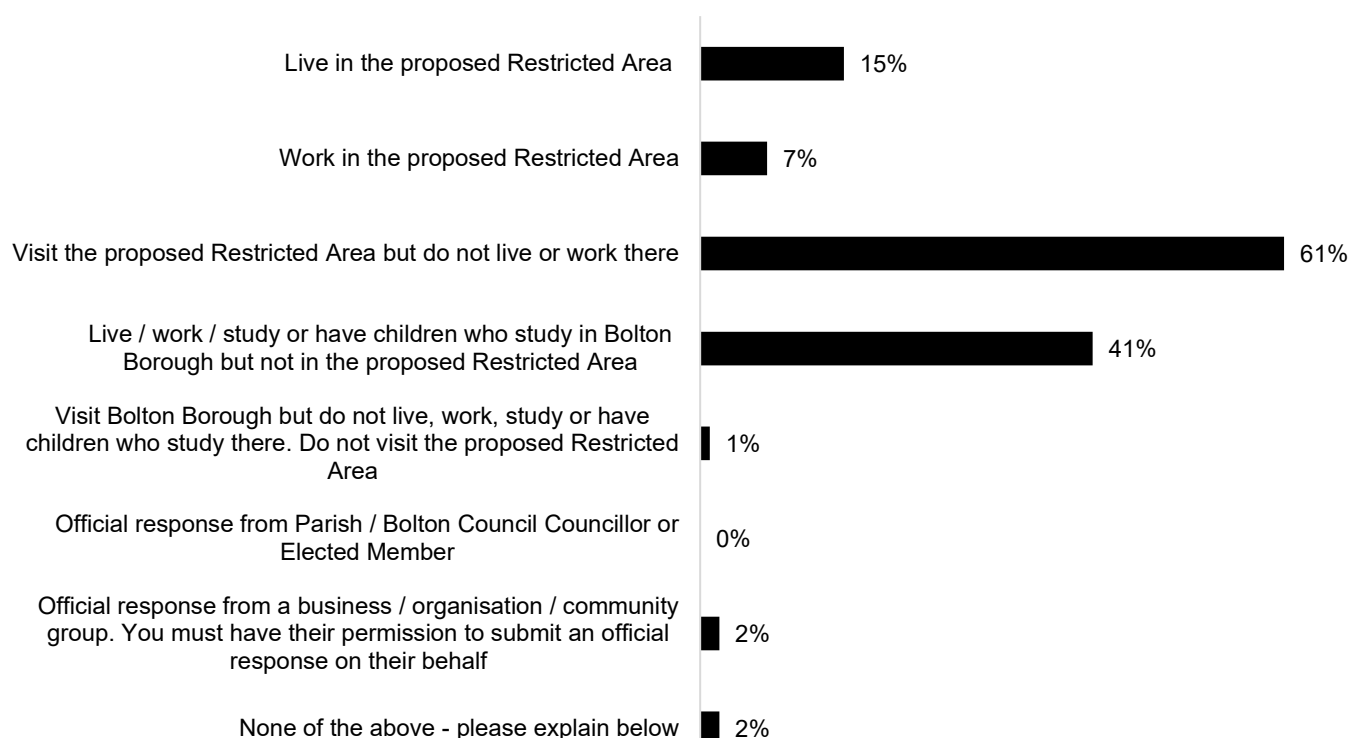
Five respondents discussed the role of reporting alongside the proposed re-introduction of the PSPO. Several noted improving reporting systems. *“There should be a well publicised telephone number where breaches of the Order can be reported. Reports need to be acted upon promptly.”*

Other comments sitting outside of the PSPO included concerns about drug use and requests for more parking.

9. Interest in the proposal

Respondents were asked to outline their interest in relation to the proposed PSPO. Over half of the 260 respondents said they visit the proposed Restricted Area but do not reside or work there (61%), and 41% live, work or study in Bolton outside of the proposed Restricted Area. 15% of respondents live in the proposed Restricted Area and 7% work in the proposed Restricted Area.

Which of the following describes you / your family's interest in this matter?



Base: 260

9a. Interest and role

Four official responses were received and five selected “*none of the above*”. Responses were received from the following: a “*Higher Officer for the West Pennine Moors SSSI*” from Natural England, a “*retired senior D.O.E endangered species Inspector and worked on the 1981 WLA*”, a member of Bolton Mountain Rescue, a local farm owner and the founder of “*Horwich clean up brigade*”.

10. Demographics

10a. Geographical

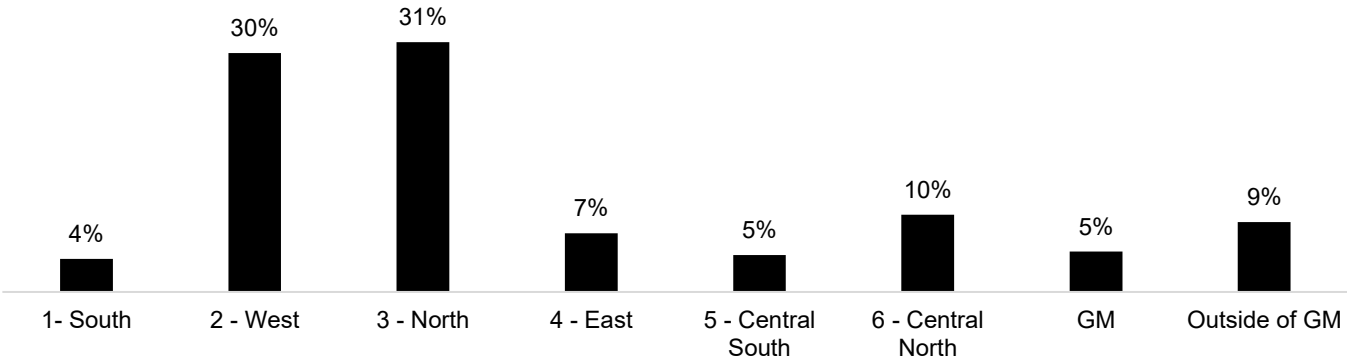
The graph below shows the geographic spread of responses across the six neighbourhoods in the borough. The table below outlines the demographics of respondents by geographical neighbourhood and is complimented with a chloropleth showing engagement across the wards. A total of 219 respondents provided their full postcode.

Responses were clustered in areas close to the moors in the North West regions of the borough, including Horwich, Astley Bridge, and Bromley Cross.

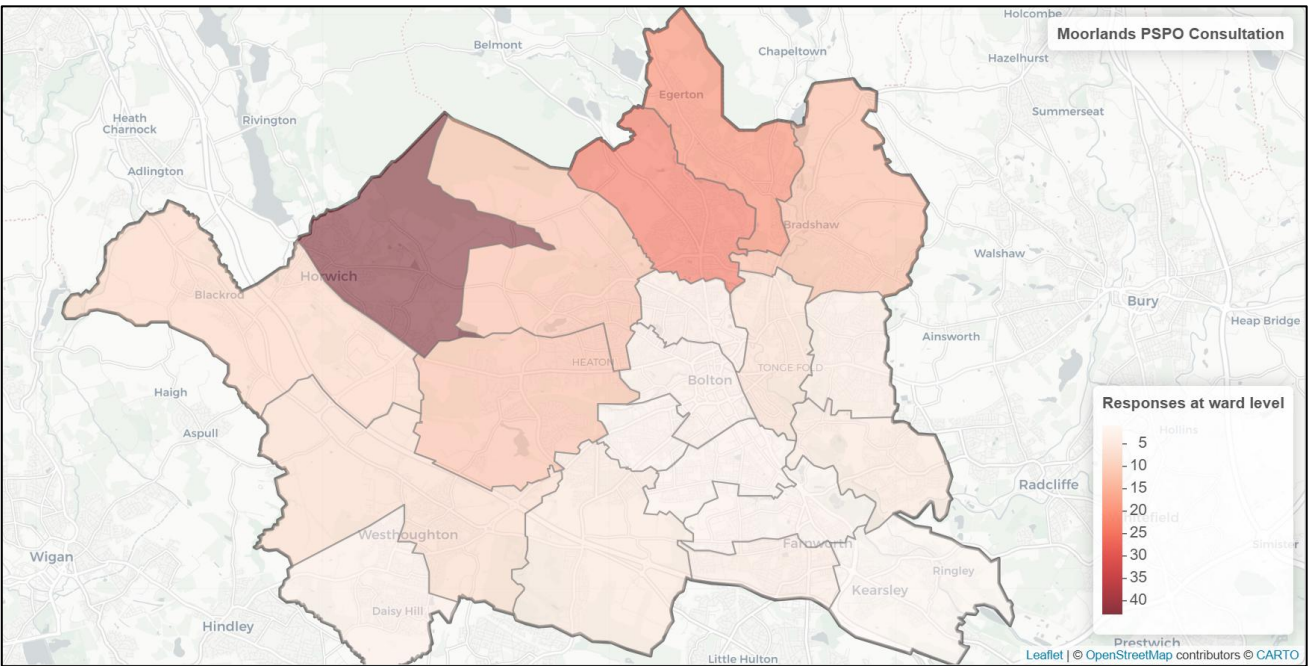


*Neighbourhoods are a local geography for integrated health and social care; all have a population of around 50,000 residents.

Geographic range of responses



Base: 219



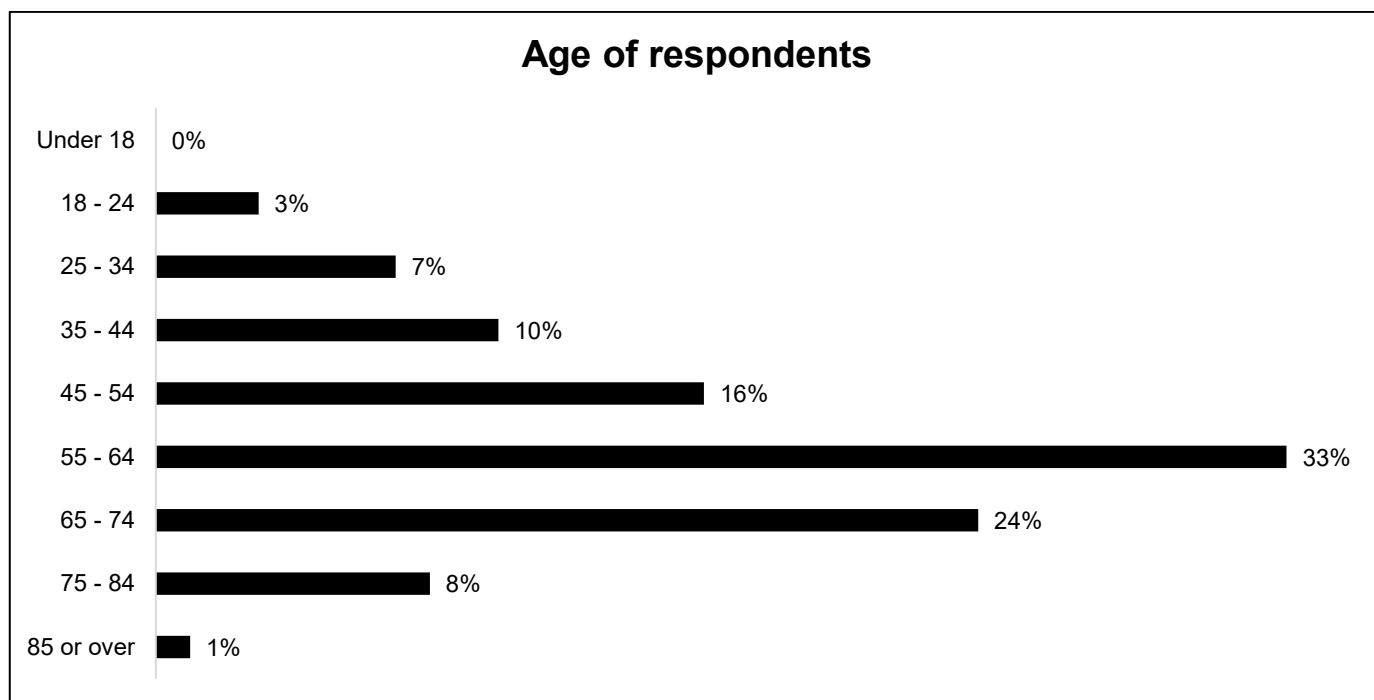
Wards	Number of responses
Horwich North	43
Astley Bridge	25
Bromley Cross	22
Bradshaw	14
Heaton, Lostock & Chew Moor	13
Smithills	13
Horwich South & Blackrod	9
Westhoughton North and Hunger Hill	8
Tonge with the Haulgh	7
Hulton	5
Little Lever & Darcy Lever	5
Brightmet	4
Farnworth South	4
Halliwel	4
Queens Park and Central	3
Westhoughton South	3
Farnworth North	2
Great Lever	2
Rumworth	2
Kearsley	1

10b. Preferred identity

256 responses were received providing the respondent's preferred identity. 160 respondents identity as being female and 96 as male.

10c. Age

Responses were received from individuals in almost all age categories. Of the 257 responses received, 24 respondents were under the age of 34 years. 150 respondents were aged between 35 – 64 years. 83 responses were received from individuals above the age of 65 years.



Base: 257

10d. Ethnicity

256 respondents provided their ethnicity when undertaking the consultation. 95% report as being White British. 5% report as being from other ethnically diverse communities. This includes 3% from the Asian / Asian British community.

11. Executive Summary

Between 9th March and 20th April 2026, the council ran a public consultation seeking to engage residents and stakeholders with an interest in the proposed Restricted Area in sharing their reflections on wildfire risk and a proposed PSPO aimed at curtailing the risk of wildfires. The consultation regarding the PSPO was conducted in the same timeframe across Chorley Council and Blackburn with Darwen Council, following the PSPO being introduced across all three authorities in 2023.

Respondents were able to respond to the consultation via a questionnaire online, with paper and alternative formats available upon request. In addition, an afternoon of fieldwork surveying visitors at Walker Fold Car Park was conducted. Posters raising awareness of the consultation were shared at key sites and on social media and supporting documentation was available on the council website.

264 responses were received during the consultation period, including five official responses. Responses were received from Higher Officers at Natural England, a member of Bolton Mountain Rescue, a farm owner and a founder of a local organisation. 71 responses were received from Chorley Council's consultation, and 89 were received from Blackburn with Darwen Council's consultation, of which Chorley



has a 100% agreement rate and Blackburn with Darwen had over 96% of respondents in agreement with the proposed introduction of the PSPO. Bolton Council received 99% overall agreement.

Respondents were asked to outline their thoughts on the prospective prohibition of certain items posing risks to moorlands within the Restricted Area. At least 98% agreed with all proposed restrictions, and 88% of respondents agreed with the spatial extent of the proposed PSPO. Areas that respondents suggested to be included within the PSPO included *"the entire moor"*, areas like Horwich Moor, Horrocks Wood car park, and Matchmoor Lane to Barrow Bridge. Other areas suggested by respondents included localities within neighbouring authorities, such as Rivington Moor. A minority suggested other green spaces to be included. 98% of respondents shared that they are concerned about wildfires and 84% of respondents think the proposed PSPO could be effective to prevent wildfires on moorland.

Other comments raised by respondents included concerns that the PSPO may require sufficient enforcement to deter the public from using the proposed prohibited items. Many respondents shared their enthusiasm for the moorlands and a general agreement for the introduction of the PSPO. In addition, some shared the need for preventative measures, including education and campaigns. A minority of respondents shared personal accounts from previous wildfires and the impact of the PSPO on preventing these. Some respondents suggested that fire wardens, patrolling, and an improved reporting system are important to enforce the PSPO, while others commented on the specific restrictions within the proposed PSPO.

Moorland Public Space Protection Order

Consultation closes on 20th April 2026

Wildfires are fast-spreading fires that burn through moorland and other vegetation, causing extensive damage. While some start naturally, most are the result of human carelessness or deliberate actions.

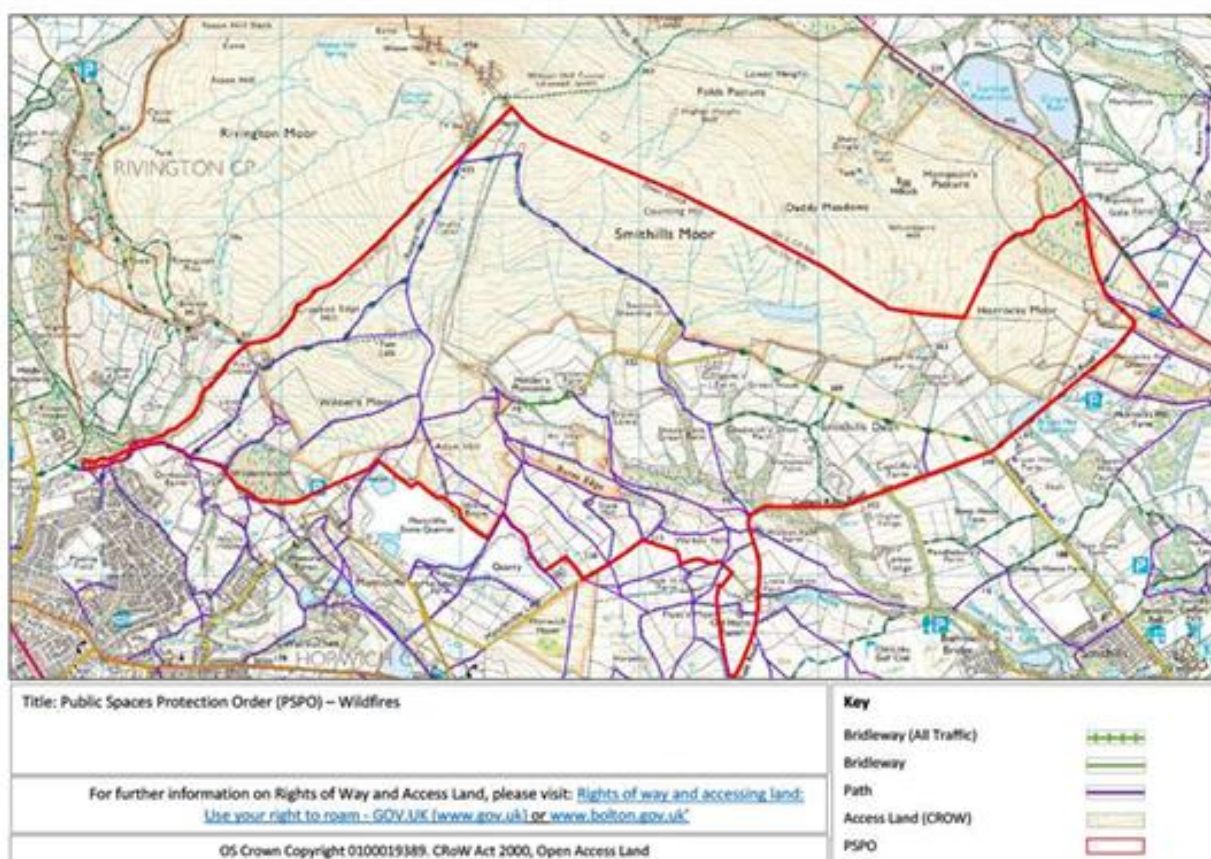
Moorland fires can quickly escalate into major incidents and are extremely difficult for emergency services to manage. They cause long-term harm to wildlife, livestock, habitats, farmland and property, leave lasting scars on the landscape, and create air and water pollution that can affect communities many miles away.

To help reduce wildfire risk, Bolton Council introduced a Public Spaces Protection Order (PSPO) in August 2023 covering part of the West Pennine Moors. The PSPO aims to prevent antisocial behaviour linked to fire-setting while still allowing people to use and enjoy the area responsibly.

A PSPO can remain in place for up to three years at which point it needs to be extended, amended or allowed to expire. We are now seeking the views of residents, businesses and agencies in relation to a proposed extension of the current PSPO.

The current PSPO prohibits (bans) activities which carry a significant risk of causing wildfires. These include building or lighting any kind of fire or barbeque, lighting fireworks or setting off sky (open flame heat source) lanterns.

The area covered by the current PSPO is outlined on the map below - detailing the restricted area as including North of Smithills Moor, to Horrocks Moor in the East, Walker Fold in the South, and Wilder's Moor in the West.



Bolton Council worked in partnership with Blackburn with Darwen Council and Chorley Council to ensure a consistent approach. All three authorities implemented matching PSPOs back in 2023, creating a wider, cross-border area of moorland covered by the same restrictions.

Please read the Frequently Asked Questions and supporting documents for full details of the current PSPO [including area covered] before giving your views on its proposed extension. You can view the documents online at www.bolton.gov.uk/directory/13/consultations/category/195 or ring 01204 334875 for a paper copy.

Responses from this public consultation will be considered by Bolton Council alongside other information when considering if the PSPO should be extended, or alternatively whether it should be amended or allowed to expire.

Your response - keeping your data safe

If you're responding as an individual you won't be identified in any report; your responses will be anonymised and grouped with responses from other people. All questions are optional so please feel free to skip any that you prefer not to answer.

Reports may be made public. If you're responding in an official capacity your response may be published but no personal details will be made public.

Any personal data you provide will be held securely by Bolton Council in line with our retention schedule and privacy policy www.bolton.gov.uk/data-protection-freedom-information/privacy-notices

We use Snap Surveys professional software to collect and process your data. Their privacy policy can be found here www.snapsurveys.com/survey-software/privacy-policy-uk/. Snap Surveys Ltd. follow the UK General Data Protection Regulation.

Behaviours

The PSPO aims to stop deliberate or careless actions which may result in wildfires in the area of moorland defined on the map [the Restricted Area].

There are exemptions for private property, and where the person had written consent from the landowner or council. We will ask you about the area covered in a later question.

Q1. How far do you agree / disagree that the following should continue to be prohibited [banned] in the Restricted Area covered by the PSPO [unless covered by exemptions]?

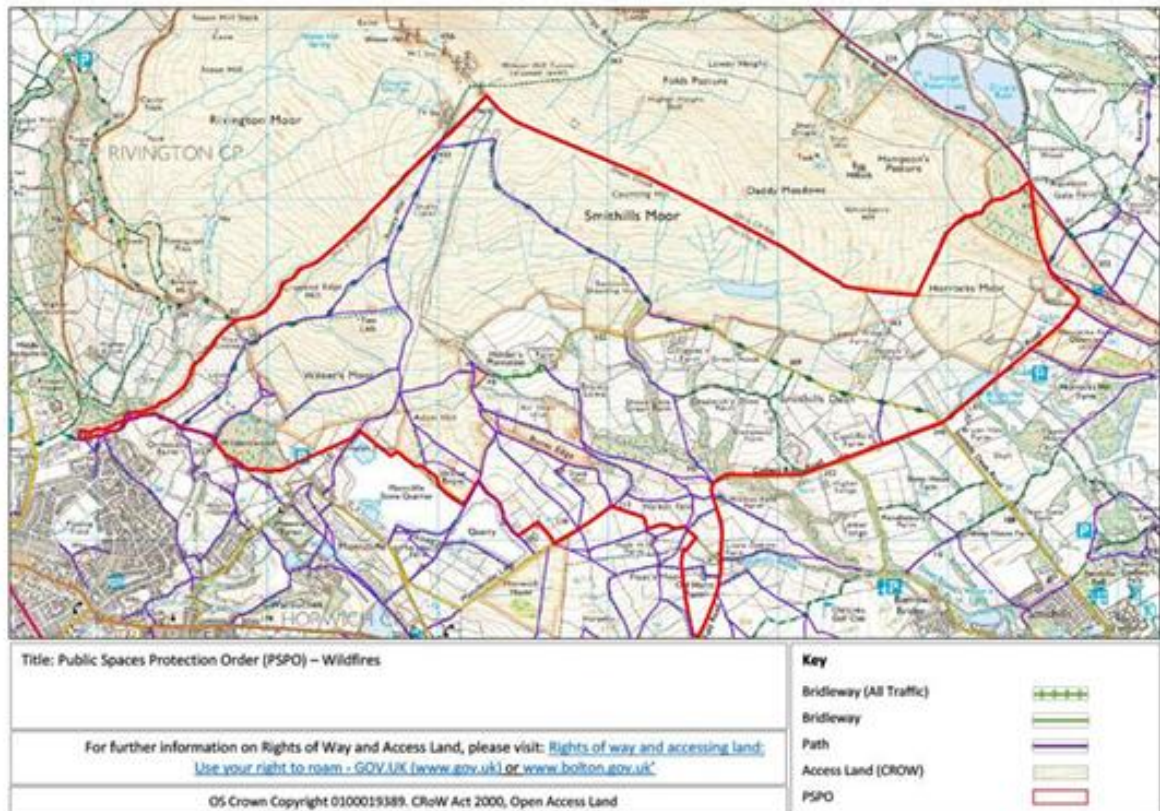
	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	No opinion / Not applicable
Lighting a fire	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Lighting a barbeque	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Setting off fireworks	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Setting off a sky lantern [Chinese or other open flame heat source lantern]	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

If you disagree, please say what you disagree with and why.

Area covered

The map below shows the boundary [in red] of the Restricted Area that is covered by the current PSPO. This is the area in which the behaviours are currently prohibited [banned]

The map details the restricted area as including North of Smithills Moor, to Horrocks Moor in the East, Walker Fold in the South, and Wilder's Moor in the West.



Does the Restricted Area cover the right area of moorland?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No, the PSPO should cover a different area of the moorland
- ☐ No, there should be a PSPO but it should cover a smaller area
- ☐ There should not be a PSPO on this area of moorland
- ☐ No opinion

Please say which area should be covered by Bolton Council's PSPO.

Overall

How concerned / unconcerned are you about wildfires on this area of moorland?

- ☐ Very concerned
- ☐ Concerned
- ☐ Not very concerned
- ☐ Not concerned at all
- ☐ No opinion

How effective / ineffective do you think the proposed PSPO is in helping to prevent wildfires on this area of moorland?

- ☐ Very effective ☐ Effective ☐ Not very effective ☐ Not effective at all ☐ I don't think wildfires are a problem on this area of moorland ☐ No opinion

Taking everything into consideration, please say if you agree or disagree with the following statement:

"I support Bolton Council in extending the current Public Spaces Protection Order aimed at preventing wildfires on this moorland."

- ☐ Strongly agree ☐ Agree ☐ Disagree ☐ Strongly disagree ☐ No opinion

Please use this space if you'd like to make any comments about this proposal, or for any alternative suggestions.

Your interest

Which of the following describes you / your family's interest in this matter?

- ☐ Live in the proposed Restricted Area
☐ Work in the proposed Restricted Area
☐ Visit the proposed Restricted Area but do not live or work there
☐ Live / work / study or have children who study in Bolton Borough but not in the proposed Restricted Area
☐ Visit Bolton Borough but do not live, work, study or have children who study there. Do not visit the proposed Restricted Area.
☐ Official response from Parish / Bolton Council Councillor or Elected Member
☐ Official response from a business / organisation / community group. You must have their permission to submit an official response on their behalf.
☐ None of the above - please explain below

Please say what your interest is.

Please say which ward, business organisation or community group you represent.

Please say what your role is - in what official capacity do you represent the business, organisation or community group etc?

About you

Your answers in this section help us to make sure we are getting views from different types of people. They won't be used to contact or identify you.

Please give your full postcode.

Are you...?

☐ Female

☐ Male

☐ Identify in another way

Which age group are you in?

☐ Under 18

☐ 35 - 44

☐ 65 - 74

☐ 18 - 24

☐ 45 - 54

☐ 75 - 84

☐ 25 - 34

☐ 55 - 64

☐ 85 or over

Q What is your ethnic group?

13.

☐ White British

☐ Asian or Asian British

☐ White other

☐ Black, Black British, Caribbean or African

☐ Mixed or Multiple ethnic group

☐ Other ethnic group

Thanks! Please click 'submit' to send your response through to us.



Appendix B – Response from the Wildlife Trust, Smithills Estate

“The Woodland trust Smithills Estate, have experiences 5 Wildfire incidents since the 2018 fire, last year we had, 29 breaches in the PSPO we can evidences with some form of picture. We a remarkable amount of irresponsibility from the public on the moorland of Bolton and in our uplands.

Wildfire needs to be taken seriously, and we should be working together to use every possible tool in the toolbox to help with this. The trust undertakes a lot of public education around Smithills and undertakes a large amount of prevention. With the 2018 fire costing the Public purse so much we need to defend the moorland form wildfire best we can. Those visiting the moorland need to see consequences to taking such risks.

The PSPO and its enforcement help us to do that at the woodland trust Smithills Estate. We support the renewal of the PSPO for Wildfire as it will prevent irresponsible and inform the public there is consequences for such actions.”