

Rooted in place  
 Impactful for participants  
 Interactivity and interpretative  
 Magic

**Case Study: Rivers of Light**

The Rivers of Light Lantern Parade in Newmarket, Forest Heath, was a co-delivered event in partnership with Newmarket Community Arts, Newmarket Community Nature Reserve and Newmarket Town Council.

Residents walked the route of the chalk stream carrying their handmade lanterns before experiencing a finale of local musicians, choirs and dance performances.

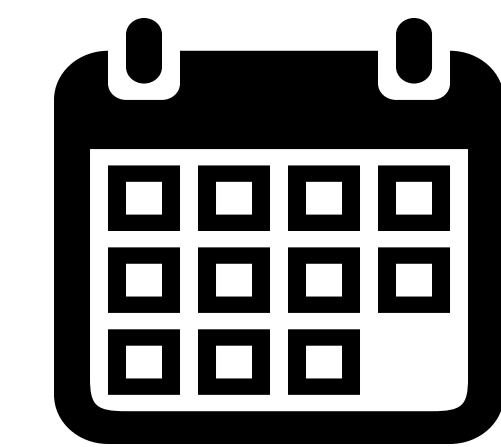
## Why Rivers of Light Lantern Parade?

MarketPlace already has a positive relationship with three of the partners, and this was an opportunity to work with a new partner, Newmarket Community Nature Reserve. Our newly recruited local Creative Producer led the delivery of this project with a short lead time.

It was an opportunity for the Producer to represent MarketPlace, develop relationships with local partners, and work directly with new MarketPlace community groups. Connecting environmental themes with local heritage through a creative experience was an accessible introduction for a targeted area of Newmarket to meet and connect with MarketPlace.

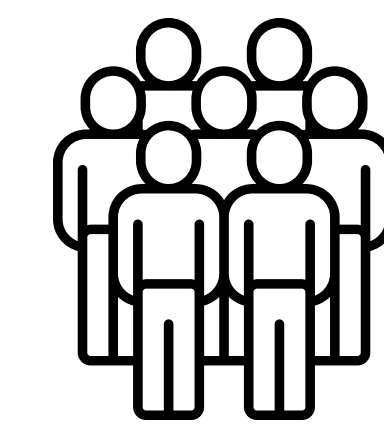
### The aim of this event was to:

- develop new relationships with local partners and groups for new members of the team
- pilot a new annual event to grow and develop the town
- reach target audiences for MarketPlace
- build awareness of the heritage of the chalk stream and environmental issues/action



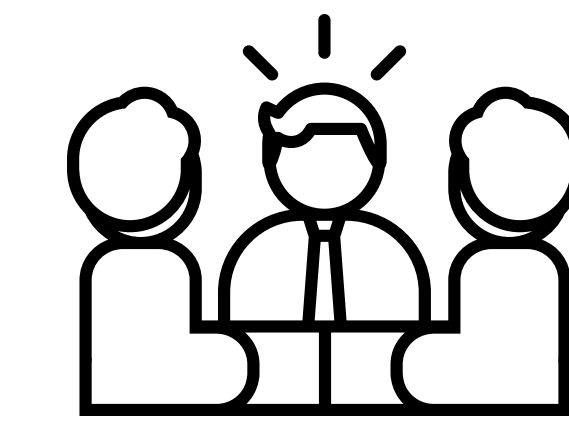
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WORKSHOPS



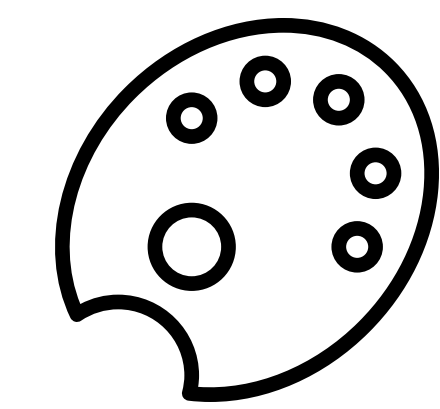
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AUDIENCE



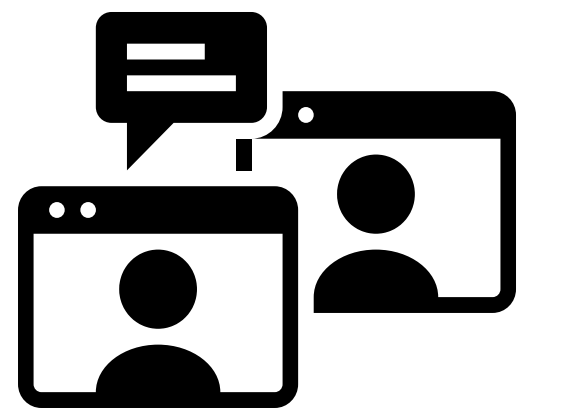
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PARTICIPANTS



2

ARTISTS



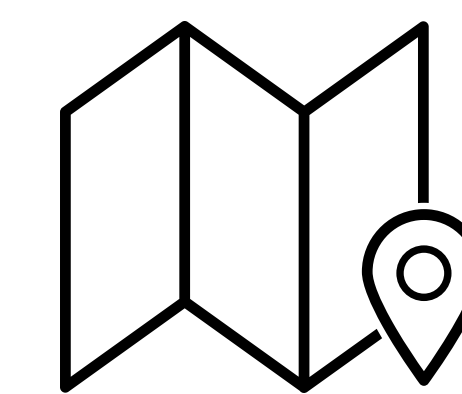
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DIGITAL AUDIENCE



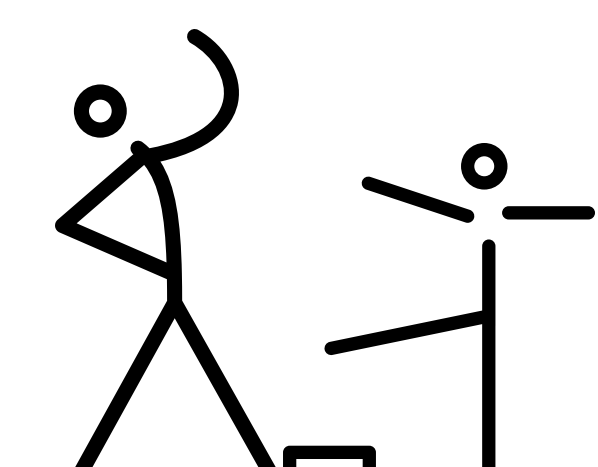
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VOLIUNTEERS



4

MILES WALKED



3

COMMUNITY GROUPS

## What happened?

Artwork for the parade was co-created by artist Penny Sobr with the Brownies, Guides, Scouts and the general public across a series of lantern-making workshops.

Inspired by ancient light festivals and the history of Newmarket, the event invited local people to follow the town's 'Yellow Brick Road' chalk stream on Sat, 18 February and helped raise awareness about the ecology of the area and the need to protect it.

Families and residents along the route were the target demographic as the route runs through areas of least engagement.

The event brought together and showcased different creative community groups, musicians and artists, including the Newmarket Samba Band, Newmarket School of Dance, Newmarket Community Choir and the Slack Magirdle Morris Dancers provided entertainment along the route, including a performance of a song written especially for the event - Let The Rivers Flow.

**'The workshops running up to the parade were fantastic. The atmosphere was wonderful on the evening of the event' - Audience feedback**

**'It was fun, the girls had fun making the lanterns and enjoyed the parade' - Audience feedback**

**'Absolutely brilliant event from start to finish. The parade led by the samba band was awesome, the lanterns and crowd were brilliant, and so was Coventina. Newmarket choir were spot on with a great rendition of the Rivers of Light song' - Audience feedback**

## Watch here



Rivers of Light



'It was a community coming together'

'It made one feel good to be involved with a community event'

'It was joyful, bringing light into the winter months. It was nice to see so many people coming together both in preparation and participation'

- Audience Feedback

# Are more people from places of least engagement experiencing and inspired by the arts?

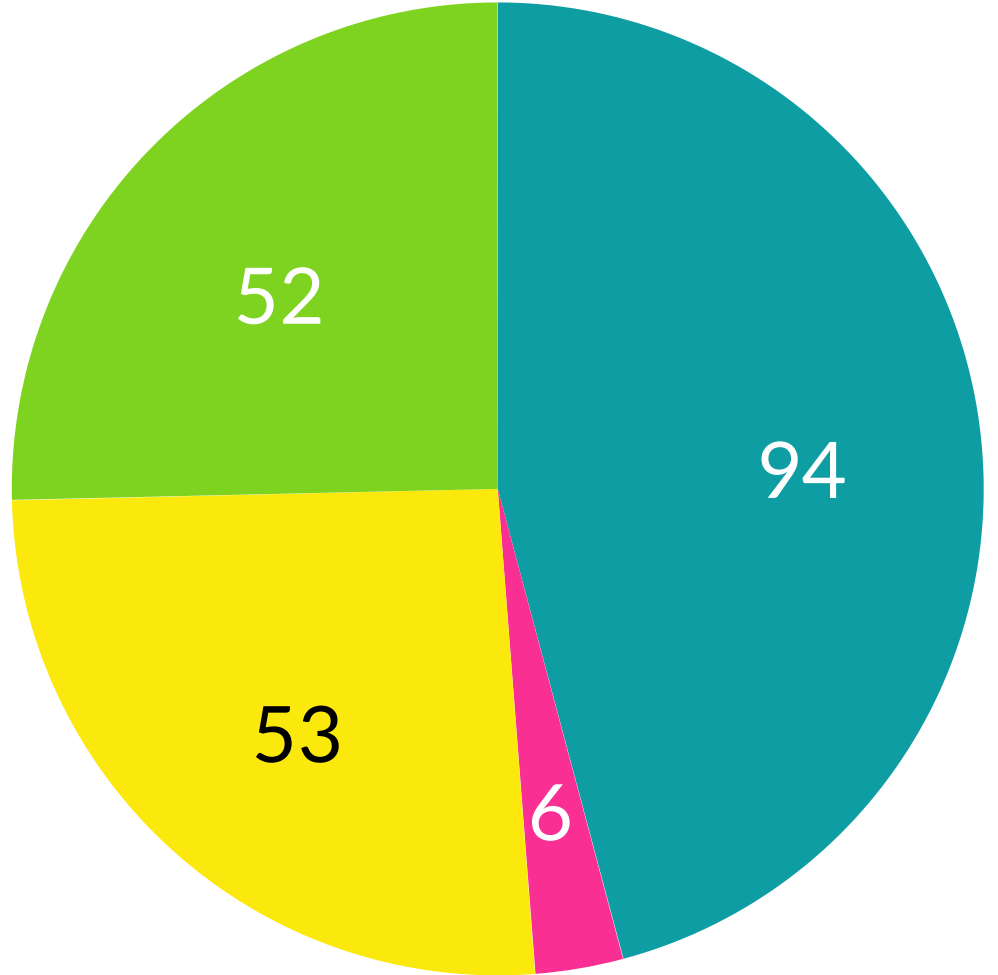
Data sources are a combination of 22 respondents from the Impact and Insight survey and 83 directly collected from workshops groups.

**6%**  
identified as D/Disabled

One attendee completed the walk in a wheelchair alongside the river bank showing it was an accessible experience. This is an above-average demographic for the area. Promoting the accessibility of the route and the short and long experience, alongside targeted workshops, could see this figure increase in future years.

### Ethnicity

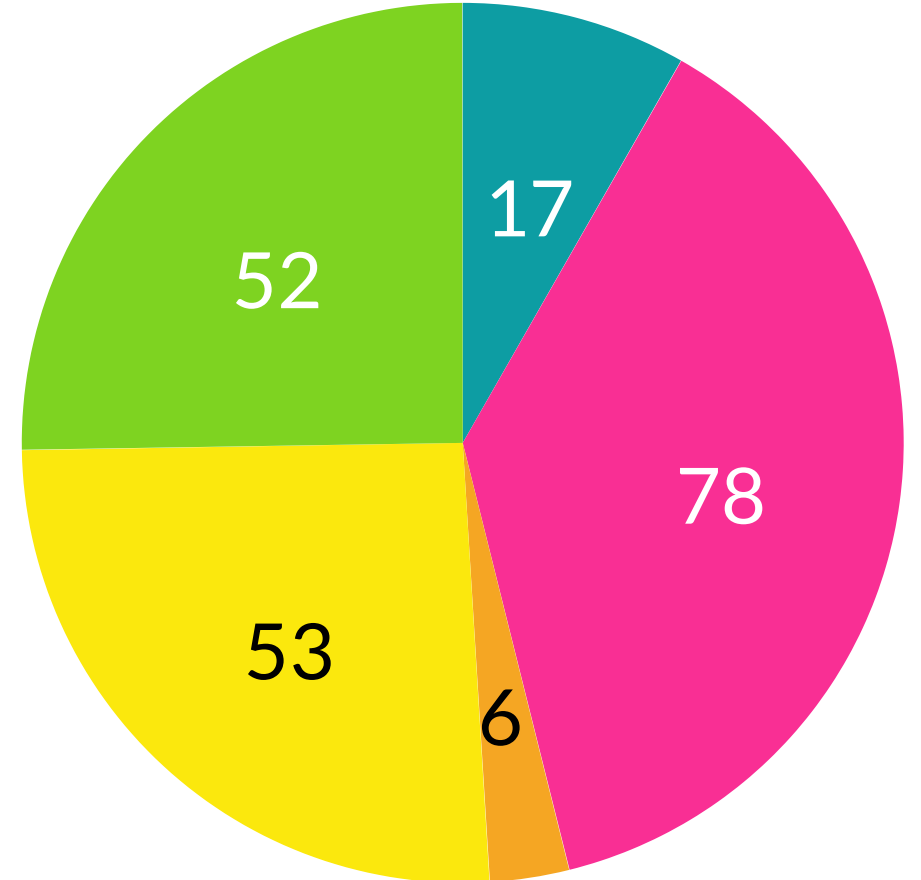
- White British (45.85%)
- Asian (2.93%)
- Unknown (25.85%) Protected
- characteristic (25.37%)



5% of the population of Newmarket is Asian; by removing the unknown and protected characteristics from this sample, the percentage of Asian attendees from our selection would represent 6% of the audience. This shows that MarketPlace is reaching the representation of Newmarket in their targeted activity.

### Gender

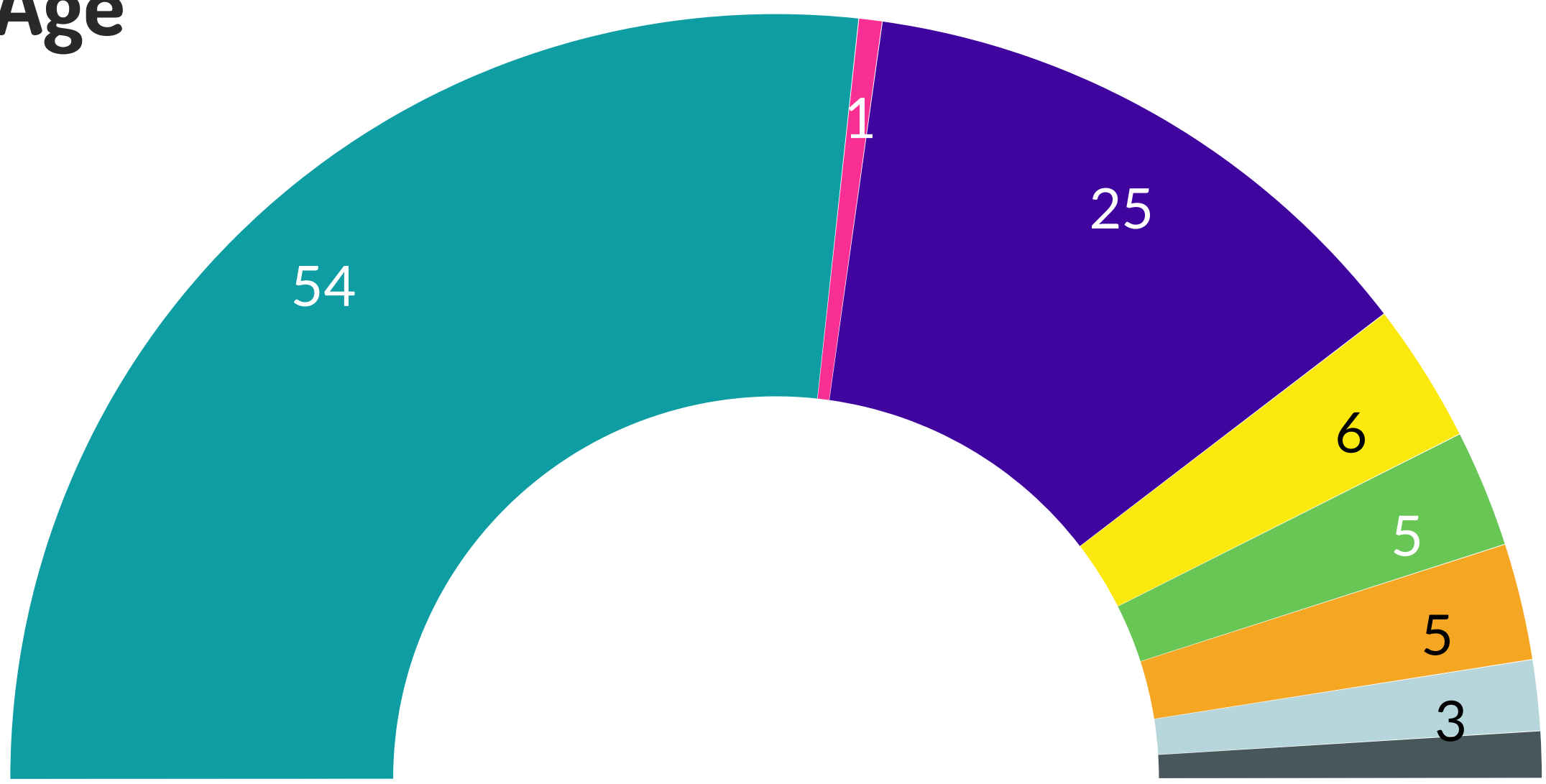
- Male (8.25%)
- Female (37.86%)
- Prefer not to say (2.91%)
- Unknown (25.73%)
- Protected characteristic (25.24%)



Females are more likely to complete a survey on behalf of the whole family, so the high percentage of female respondents is unsurprising. Please note: The numbers of protected characteristics represent under 16 respondents.

### Age

- Under 16 (53.47%)
- 16-24 (0.99%)
- 25-34 (24.75%)
- 35-44 (5.94%)
- 45-54 (4.95%)
- 55-64 (4.95%)
- 65-74 (2.97%)
- 75+ (1.98%)



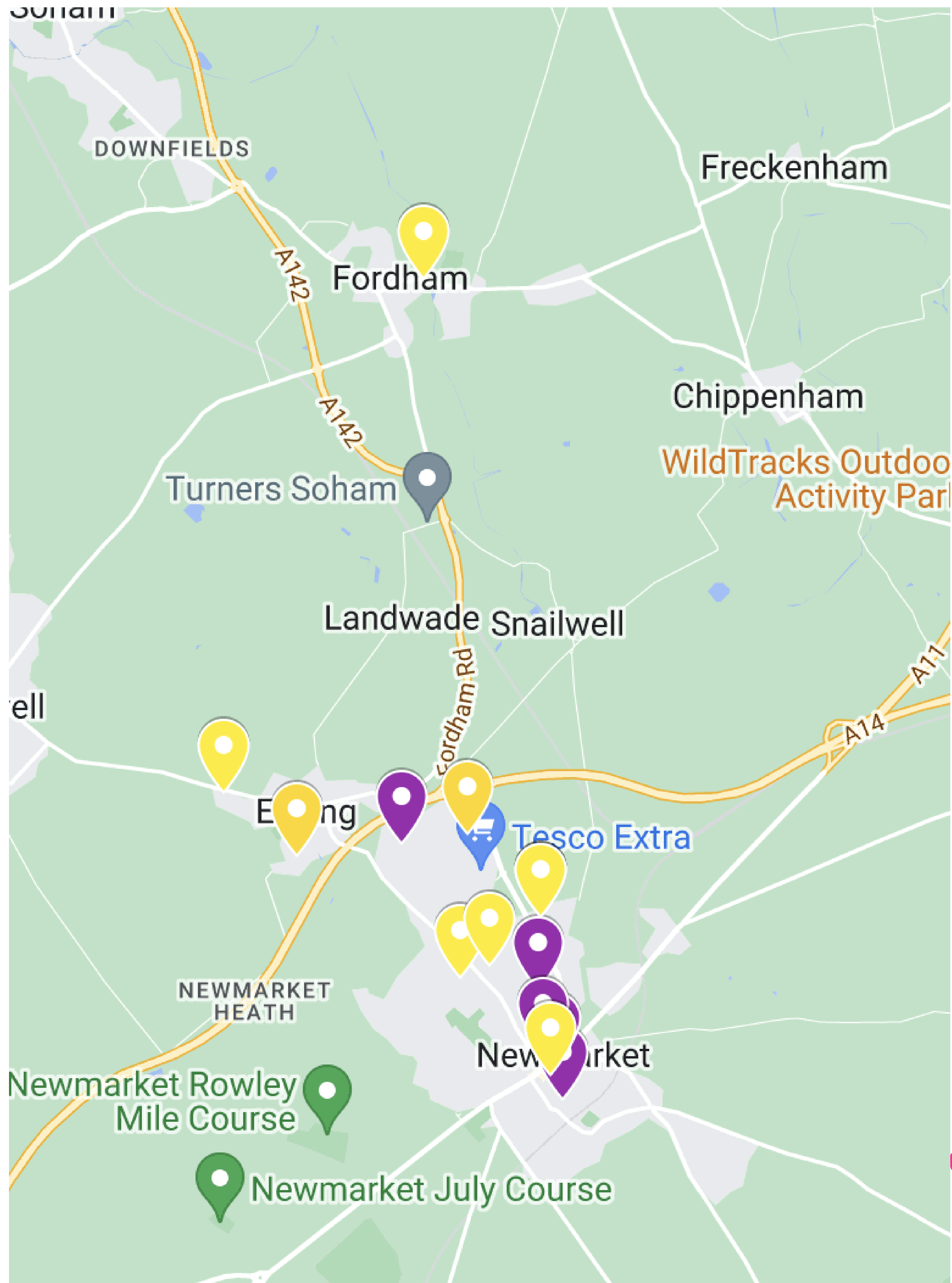
The breadth of ages combined with the average attendee group size of 5 shows that this event is a family experience that enables more isolated older community members to engage in the activity on their doorstep. Many young families were in attendance and didn't have time to fill out surveys, with some participating in only part of the experience due to small children being unable to complete the whole route, highlighting a gap in the data captured.

**5**  
was the average group size of those attending.

The largest group sizes were 30 and 15. The collective and public experience meant that people felt comfortable and confident attending independently.

**17%**  
hadn't attended an arts or culture event in the last 12 months

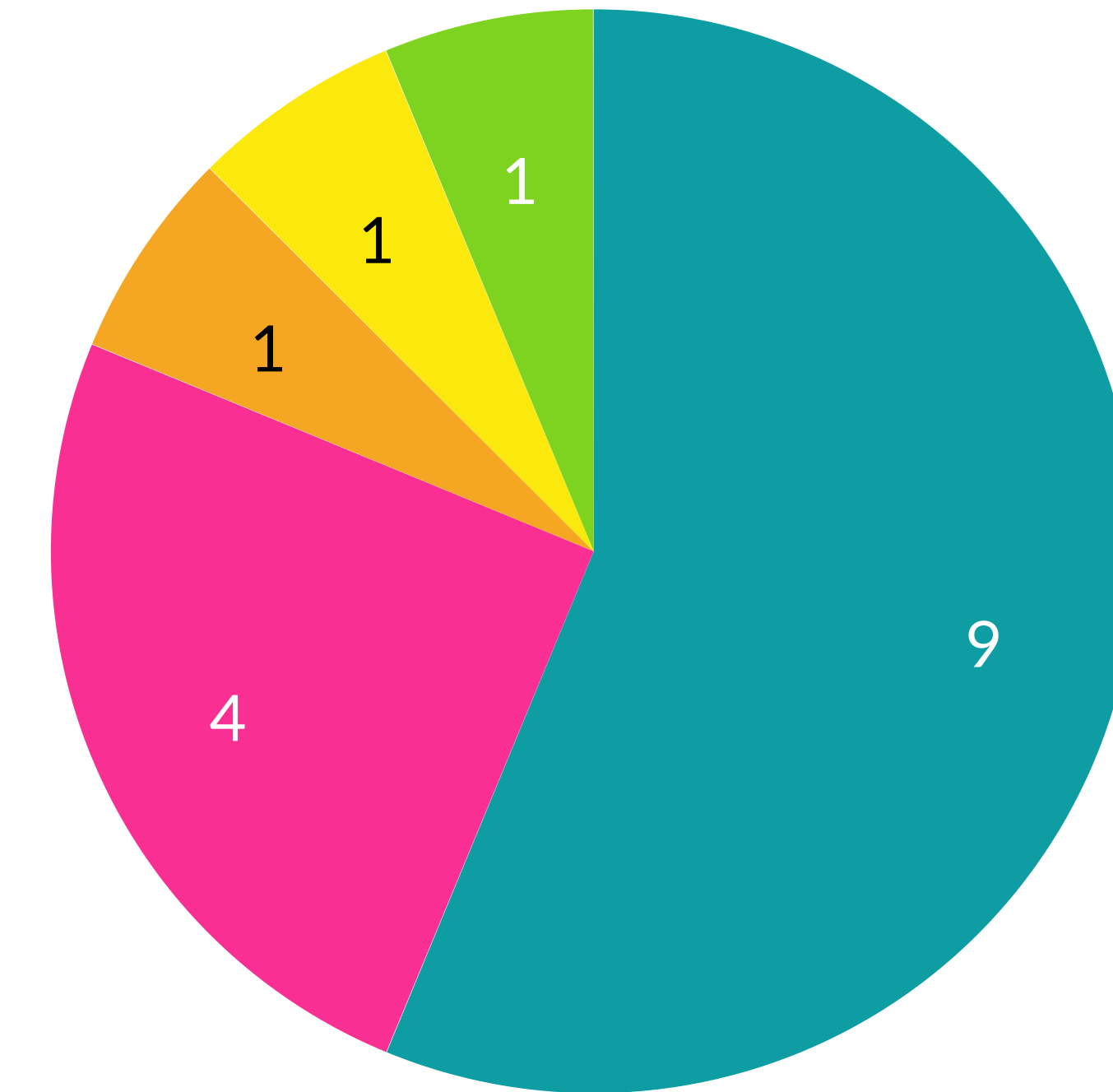
This statistic is skewed by the number of parade attendees participating in the previous lantern-making workshops. The 17% is representative of the residents who attended by discovering the event on their doorstep.



## Where did attendees and participants come from?

### Location

- Woodditton (56.25%)
- Soham (25%)
- Fulbourn (6.25%)
- Downham (6.25%)
- Trowbridge (6.25%)



The range of locations of Woodditton, Soham and Fulbourn rather than Newmarket represents people travelling to attend from outlier villages due to limited opportunities to engage. This shows that online social media marketing and including local amateurs and professionals to perform as part of the experience meant we engaged their popular local followers.

**'It was a bright spark in a cultural desert here in West Suffolk especially Newmarket!**

**Made me feel enthused hopeful and positive for the survival of our chalk stream' - Audience Feedback**



## Action Learning

The success of this project lies in its organic growth from a conversation between two community groups, Newmarket Community Arts and Newmarket Community Nature Reserve. From a litter pick with residents, a chat about the issues created this opportunity. Contacting and connecting with groups and people as a starting point ensures ownership over activity.

This experience highlighted challenges in communication and marketing. As the first time using Eventbrite to gauge attendance, the advanced bookings were low compared to the large numbers that attended on the day. Working with children and young people before the event across a series of weeks guaranteed attendance and word of mouth to ensure an audience.

**"We wanted to involve younger people so we went to the scouts, who said they would love to be involved, though they didn't know about MarketPlace. The power of word of mouth is very visible and it infiltrated through to the parents. It's also about talking about it - going to speak to people finding out what they want. The scout leaders were so great." - Louise, Creative Producer.**

Two halves to the route were created. However, this wasn't accessible knowledge to those joining in as the parade travelled along the route and for some attendees. The event would have benefited from more volunteers and stewards to support communications as the event went on.

Finding the right artist to co-design and make with children and young people was a part of the success. It created a framework for different ages and abilities to engage and contribute authentically to the lanterns for the parade. Pre-made structures were provided for decoration and full builds for those with more time, interest and ability to make lanterns. Providing different access points for positive participation fosters pride and confidence in participants.

**'I think collaborating with Penny, the artist, brought the best out of people in those workshops. She gave them free rein, but she was also gave that kind of guidance saying, "well, what if you did that", so that it looked good. But without taking away from anybody, it was all their work, but she was just there to make little kind of what-if-you-did-that, what-have-you-tried kind of thing?' - Louise, Creative Producer.**

**'It was lovely but a very long, slow walk without a way to get back to the start after it finished. I was also a bit sad that the fact we'd be following a River Goddess wasn't made clear until quite late on in the publicity' - Audience Feedback.**

**"Bring a scooter or a bike for little ones; it's a LONG route' - Audience Feedback**

Managing pace with en route entertainment was challenging, and the event could grow to include temporary light installations along the river to increase points of interest and create self-directed walks beyond the parade evening.' Feedback has highlighted a need to deepen the relationship with the environmental project partners and develop more outcomes for environmental awareness alongside heritage learning and experiences to deepen engagement.

**I'd have been interested to learn more about the route/chalk stream as part of the event. But maybe I missed that bit!' - Audience Feedback.**

For those that didn't attend the lantern-making workshops, there was a lack of information and knowledge sharing of the chalk stream. Embedding ways to disseminate this creatively, could be connected to the potential for installations along the route to accompany the lanterns. A leaflet with images of the different elements on lanterns with their significance could be a trail activity for attendees as part of the experience.

Participation through stealth and conversation galvanised community participation in the project. Inviting community creatives from the local choir, dance school, musicians, and Morris dancers provided different community and generational engagement points into the event.

The event enabled the team to connect and talk through more work with key partners that participated and attended, building new connections. This has highlighted opportunities for staged and cross-marketing events with crucial community opportunities, e.g. the anniversary of Studland Park architecture. So could generate additional investment from sports, health and wellbeing funders.

## What next?

The team is already actioning their learning on both the routes and the marketing messaging about the experience for different audiences. It has highlighted the value of investing in letter box drops along residential streets for advanced invitations for residents to attend,

They are looking to increase the range of professional artists and performers for way key stopping points and create the opportunity to collect feedback; the success of the partnership working across The Rivers of Light project has diversified the scope and scale of the project to become an annual event. The heritage and environmental themes and learning that can take place through a creative lens make this a scaleable project as the communities ambition grows.

**"We've got a whole team of people including scientists who continue looking at the river and the environment, which we're hoping will bring more people in to do something else next time" - Louise, Creative Producer.**

The chalk stream heritage at the project's core means it can expand to two other sites within Newmarket to reach more audiences and extend the event. This river route was chosen as it follows postcode targeting of MarketPlace priority audiences.

It also can potentially roll out to other towns with chalk streams, such as Mildenhall. Investing in ideas the team can transfer and grow is evidence of considered risk and the new philosophy of MarketPlace in how they deliver work.

The growth of creative groups and potential in Newmarket creates the circumstance to ensure legacy from activity that MarketPlace can support and initiate. Targeting youth engagement in Newmarket will ensure that the legacy can continue. The partnerships are exploring the potential for a youth arts council; testing out this model and using the Rivers of Light Festival as a project they can actively support, and influence, could create a vehicle for Arts Award delivery and youth project bursaries and become a key part of creative careers pathways in Newmarket.

Fun is important for a new event experience in a hard-to-engage community. The words that audiences choose to describe the event included 'Energising' and 'Exercise', shows that the event supports health and well-being outcomes for the community. 'Different', 'Creative' and 'Community' shows that this is a distinctive art form for this community to experience and creates a sense of togetherness.

This highlights an area for evaluation and exploration in the second year of delivering this event. The health and well-being outcomes identified by participants emphasise an opportunity for diverse potential funders and target groups to participation.

Understanding that attendees would have learned a limited amount from experience this year, MarketPlace aims to embed more locally relevant heritage.

