



**Svalbard Social Science Initiative**

# **Public Consultation on Views Towards Management of Central Spitsbergen**

**Draft Report**

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## **Executive Summary**

The Svalbard Social Science Institute (SSSI) conducted a survey to gather public views towards key aspects of the use and management of Central Spitsbergen for consideration in the public consultation for the New Management Plan for Central Spitsbergen. This report is a draft version of their findings, submitted for consultation in October 2019.

Nedre Adventdalen and Central Spitsbergen's National Parks are both popular for leisure purposes, with Nedre Adventdalen frequently accessed by both residents and visitors. Nature-based activities are the most popular that are undertaken, particularly those that involve crossing the land or visiting multiple locations, such as skiing, walking and kayaking.

Our findings suggest that the overall beauty, accessibility and opportunity to spend free time there are the most highly valued characteristics of Central Spitsbergen. Economic potential was overall the least valued.

There are polarized views towards the New Management Plan for Central Spitsbergen, with opposition apparently driven by fear of strict controls, in particular access restrictions.

There is a significant minority opposed to any controls or, in particular, any access restrictions, however recognition for the need for some form of management is indicated by the majority of respondents.

The strongest support is for 'soft' management options, such as improved monitoring and time-sensitive access restrictions. Stricter restrictions on the potentially high-impact activities of motor traffic and tourism are also well-supported, but restrictions on researchers and residents are not.

The majority of respondents are in favour of some form of involvement in the planning process, with significant support for as much as possible or quite a high level of involvement.

The majority of respondents understand Norwegian, but there is an interested minority who would prefer communication regarding the management plan in English.

## **1. Introduction**

The New Management Plan for Central Spitsbergen is in development with the aim of conserving Central Spitsbergen's sensitive environment and ensuring its sustainable use. A new management regime has implications for all users of the area, not all of whom have access to policy streams or would be motivated to come forward to access them. It is important to proactively consult these users and ensure their voices are heard.

The Svalbard Social Science Institute (SSSI) conducted a survey to gather public views towards key aspects of the use and management of Central Spitsbergen. The survey was made available online from 10<sup>th</sup> to 25<sup>th</sup> September 2019, and was promoted in Longyearbyen with leaflets and advertisement in the local press. There were 17 responses. Of these, 76.5% were residents in Longyearbyen, 17.6% visit Svalbard often and the remainder declined to say. There was a good gender balance, with 52.9% female and 47.1% male, and respondents were in the age range of 19-60, with a good balance within this age range. This document presents the main findings of this survey, as a draft report. It covers the public's interaction with Nedre Adventdalen and the National Parks of Central Spitsbergen, values associated with Central Spitsbergen, and attitudes towards participation in the process of forming the New Management Plan for Central Spitsbergen.

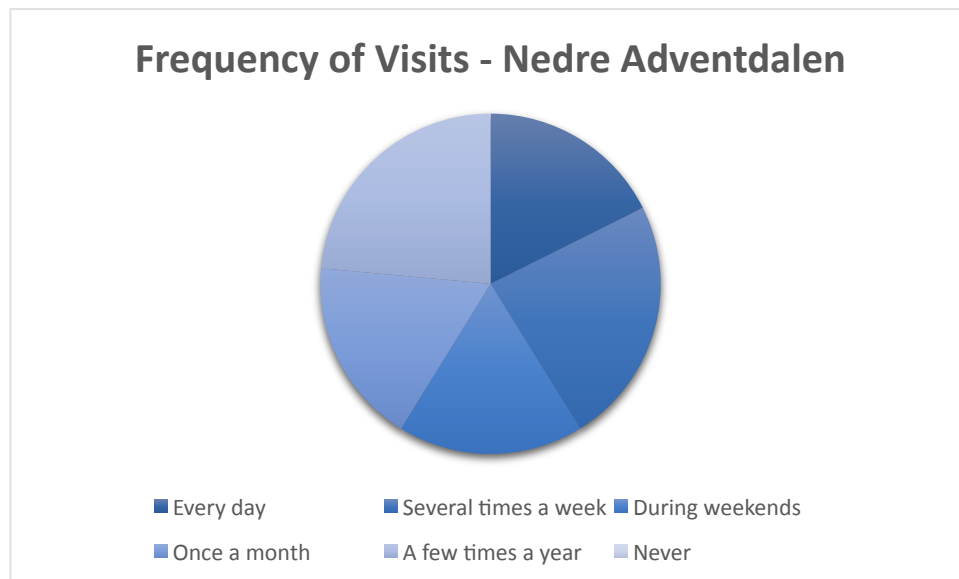
The limitation of the survey conducted is clearly the low number of responses. Given the early stage of work on the new management plan, we believe our report can be useful as a starting point for developing further tools and channels that would ensure a large number of voices heard in the debate. It has been repeatedly claimed that local authorities on Svalbard need more accurate data on societal issues and we hope that the SSSI can help foster closer cooperation among researchers currently working on Svalbard and local authorities that might be able to use data we collect and analyze. Both Sysselembetjentene and Longyearbyen Lokalstyre were informed about our initiative regarding the survey. None of the bodies could collaborate with us at the moment because of limited capacity and resources, but we gladly offer our expertise and knowledge in later stages of the work in progress.

## **2. Interaction with the Landscape of Central Spitsbergen**

The first series of questions gathered information on how people interact with the landscape of Central Spitsbergen – how often they spend time there and what activities they engage in when they are in the area.

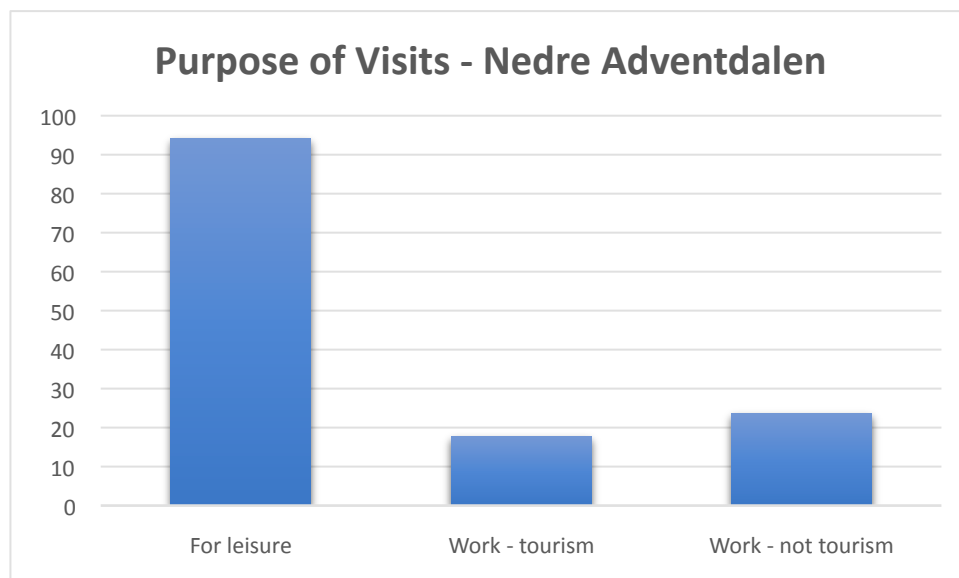
### **2.1 Nedre Adventdalen**

The survey was open to all, regardless of how familiar they were with or how frequently they visited the area. Nevertheless, as a measure of interaction with the area, respondents were asked how frequently they went to Nedre Adventdalen (Fig. 1)



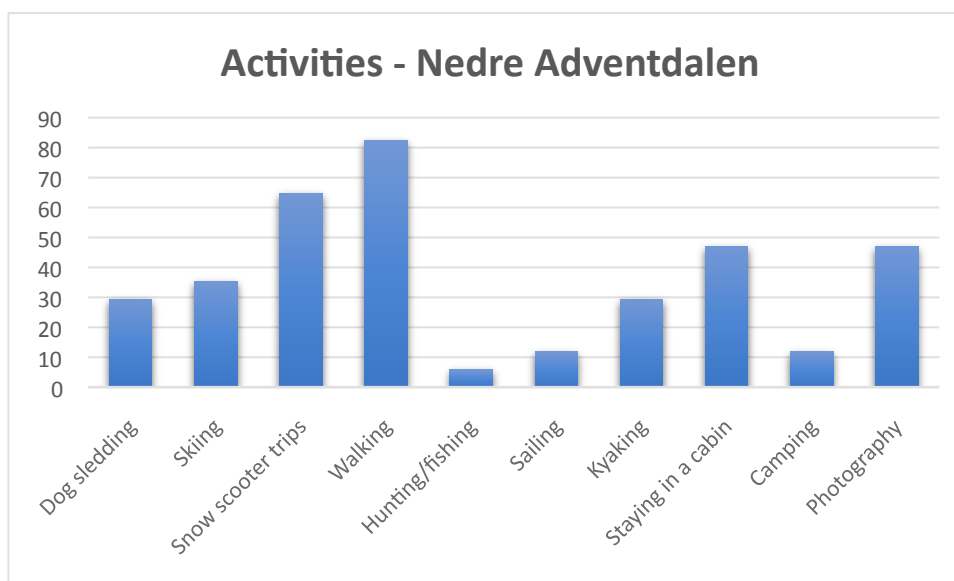
**Fig. 1: Frequency of visits to Nedre Adventdalen.**

As Fig. 1 illustrates, there is a wide spread in the amount of time respondents spend in Nedre Adventdalen. All of them visit at least a few times a year, with 17.6% at the upper end of the scale visiting every day. Asked why they visited this area, the highest response was for leisure purposes in their free time (94.1%), shown in Fig. 2. Tourism company activities were a minority activity among respondents in this instance.



**Fig. 2: Purpose of visits to Nedre Adventdalen.**

The survey respondents were then asked to elaborate on this by indicating all activities that they participate in when they visit Nedre Adventdalen. As can be seen from Fig. 3, these are a variety of nature-based activities, most of which involve traversing the area and requiring access to multiple locations.

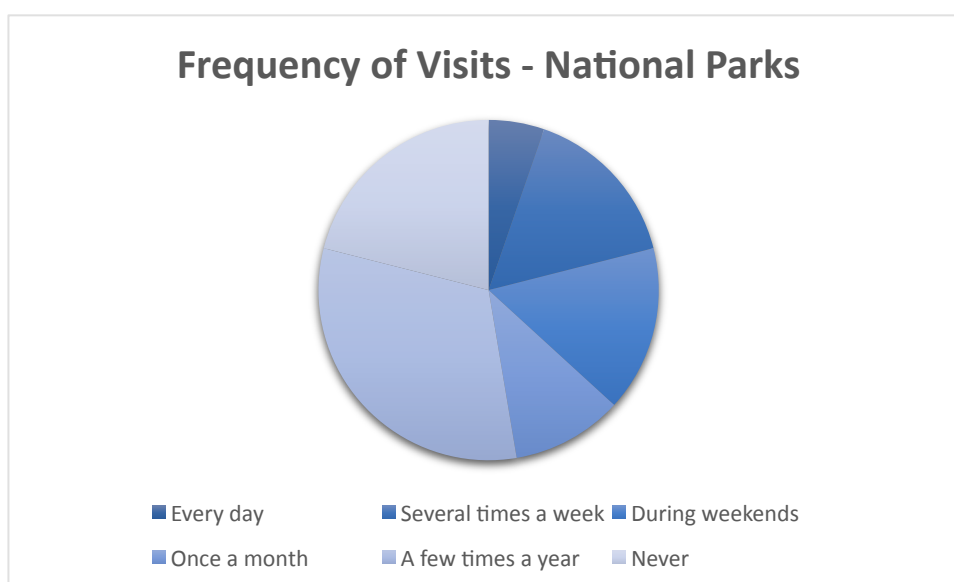


**Fig. 3: Activities undertaken in Nedre Adventdalen.**

The same questions were then asked in relation to the National Parks of Central Spitsbergen (Indre Wijdefjorden, Norde Isfjorden, Sassen-Bunsow Land and Nordenskold Land).

## 2.2 National Parks of Central Spitsbergen

Respondents spend less time in these areas than in Nedre Adventdalen (Fig. 4), potentially due to greater convenience of access to Nedre Adventdalen, with 23.5% respondents not going there at all.

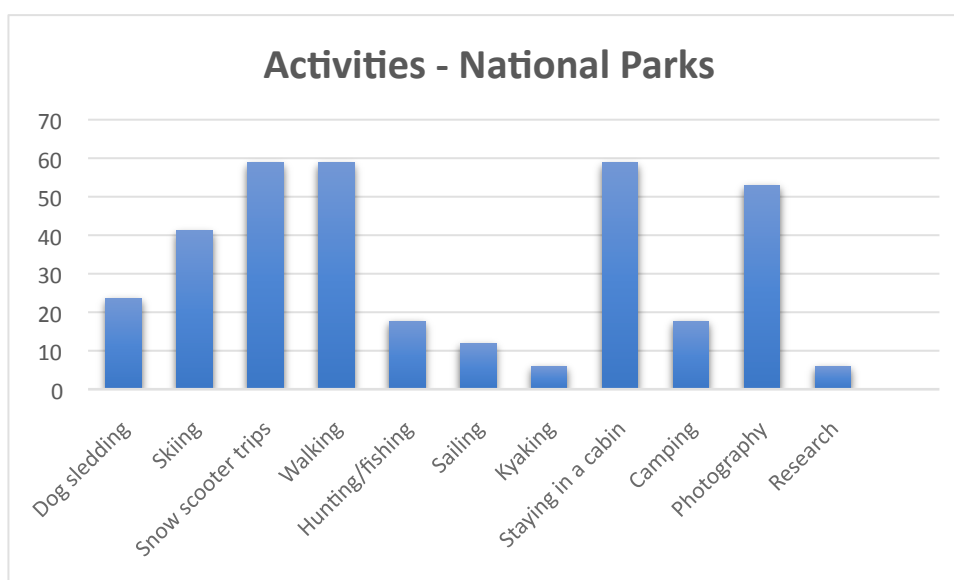


**Fig. 4: Frequency of visits to Central Spitsbergen National Parks.**

Of those who visit the National Parks of Central Spitsbergen, the majority again visit for leisure purposes, as shown in Fig. 5, and activities undertaken are broadly similar to those for Nedre Adventdalen (Fig. 6).



**Fig. 5: Purpose of visits to Central Spitsbergen National Parks.**

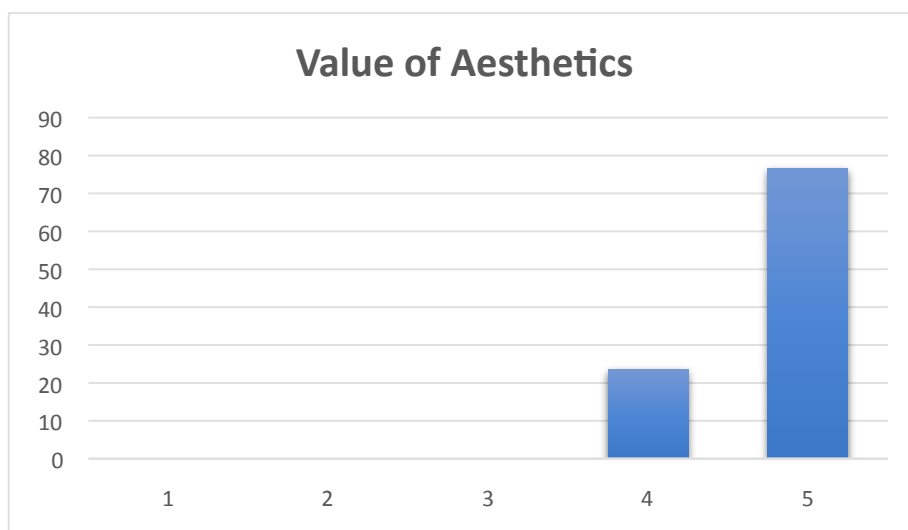


**Fig. 6: Activities undertaken in Central Spitsbergen National Parks.**

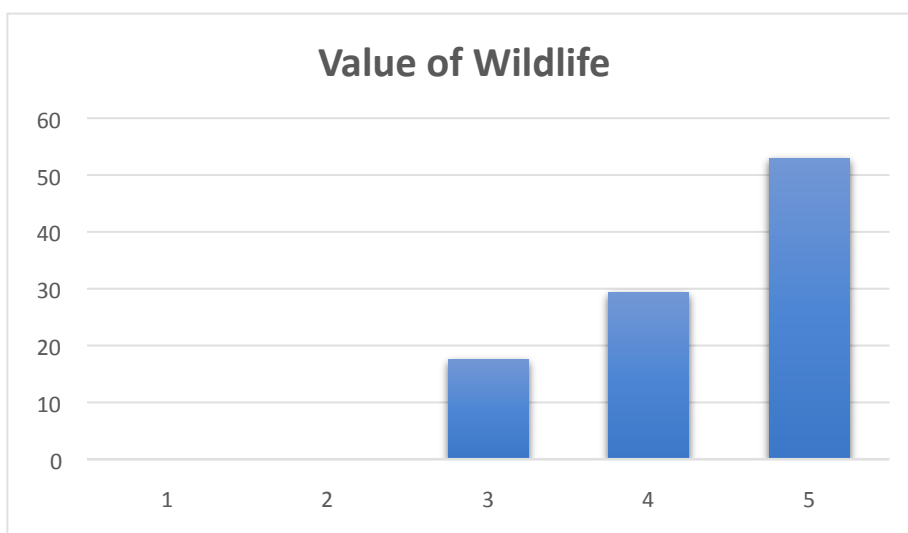
The majority of respondents who visit Central Spitsbergen's National Parks are residents of Svalbard, with only one visitor travelling to the National Parks. This is in contrast to Nedre Adventdalen, which is regularly accessed by both residents and visitors. The purpose for visits and the activities undertaken in the two areas are broadly similar, suggesting they offer similar appeal to those who decide to go there. The next section expands on this idea by exploring the values associated with Central Spitsbergen.

### **3. Values Associated with Central Spitsbergen**

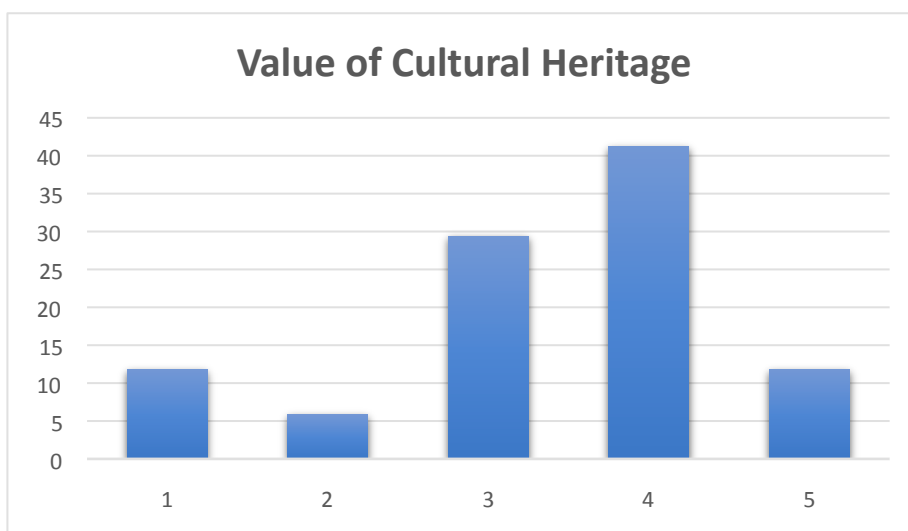
Respondents were asked to rate how much they valued a set of characteristics associated with Central Spitsbergen on a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 being irrelevant to the respondent and 5 being something they really appreciate about the region. Figs. 7-12 present their responses to this.



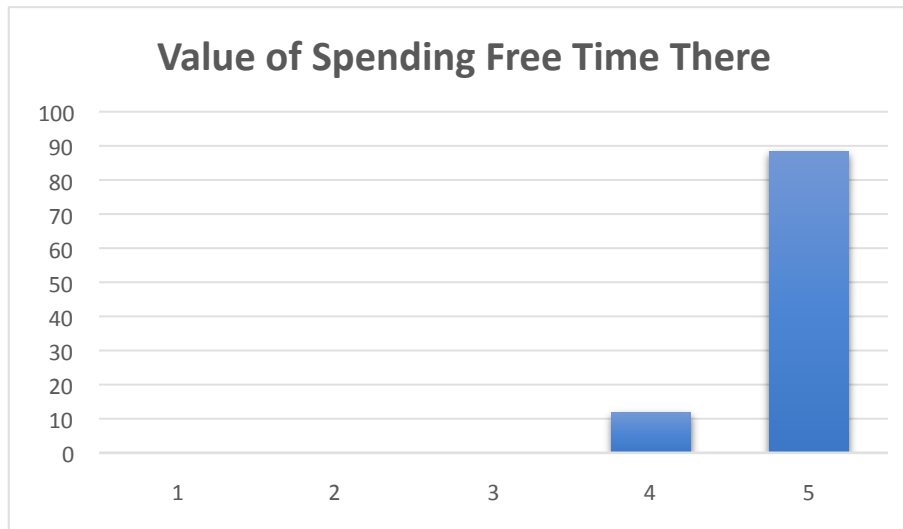
**Fig. 7:** How much respondents value Central Spitsbergen for its beauty/aesthetics.



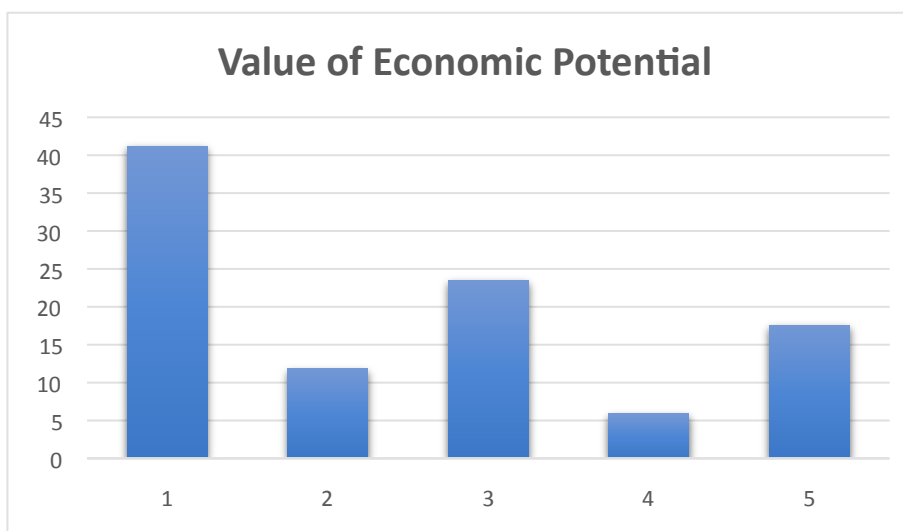
**Fig. 8:** How much respondents value Central Spitsbergen for its wildlife.



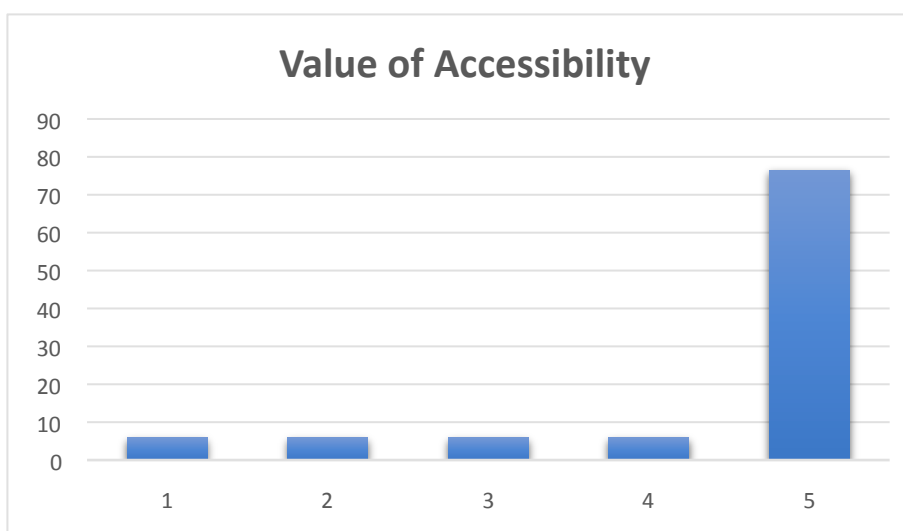
**Fig. 9:** How much respondents value Central Spitsbergen for its cultural heritage.



**Fig. 10:** How much respondents value Central Spitsbergen for spending free time there.



**Fig. 11:** How much respondents value Central Spitsbergen for its economic potential.



**Fig. 12:** How much respondents value Central Spitsbergen for its accessibility.

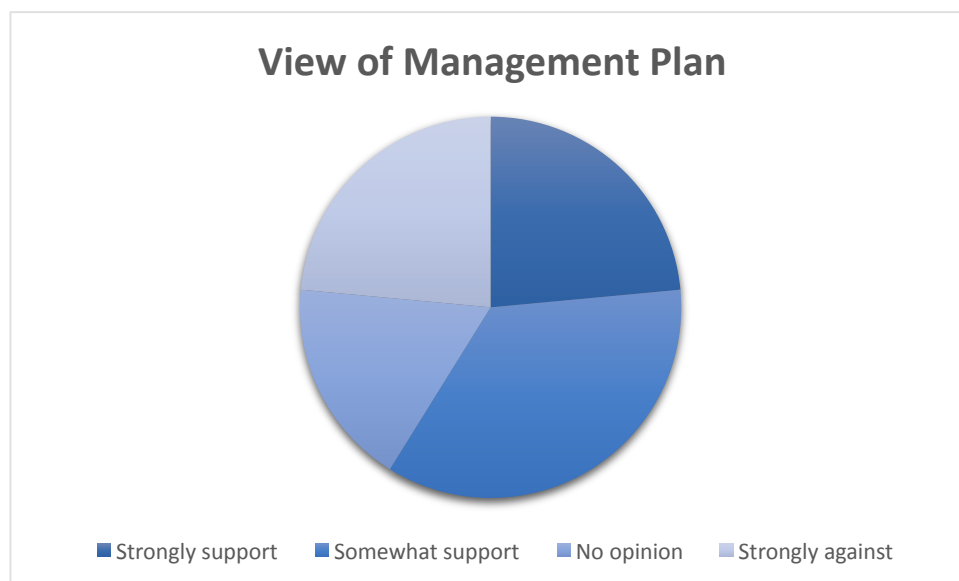


The results indicate that the most valued characteristics to those who use the area are its aesthetics, accessibility and being able to spend free time there. Economic potential is overall the least valued characteristic, suggesting that recreational access is paramount in people's concerns, while business access is not a priority for the majority.

#### 4. Participation in the Process of Forming the New Management Plan

The final set of questions explores views on the development of a new management plan and the extent to which there is support for participatory and deliberative processes.

Fig. 13 illustrates support for a new management plan for the area.



**Fig. 13: Support for a new management plan for Central Spitsbergen.**

There was a range of responses to this question, including a significant fraction of polarized views on both sides, suggesting the plan may prove somewhat controversial. Comments were invited on the matter, and these communicated a sense of trepidation over the changes, particularly with regards to access, yet these views were accompanied by acknowledgement that the area is fragile and some measures may be necessary to protect it.



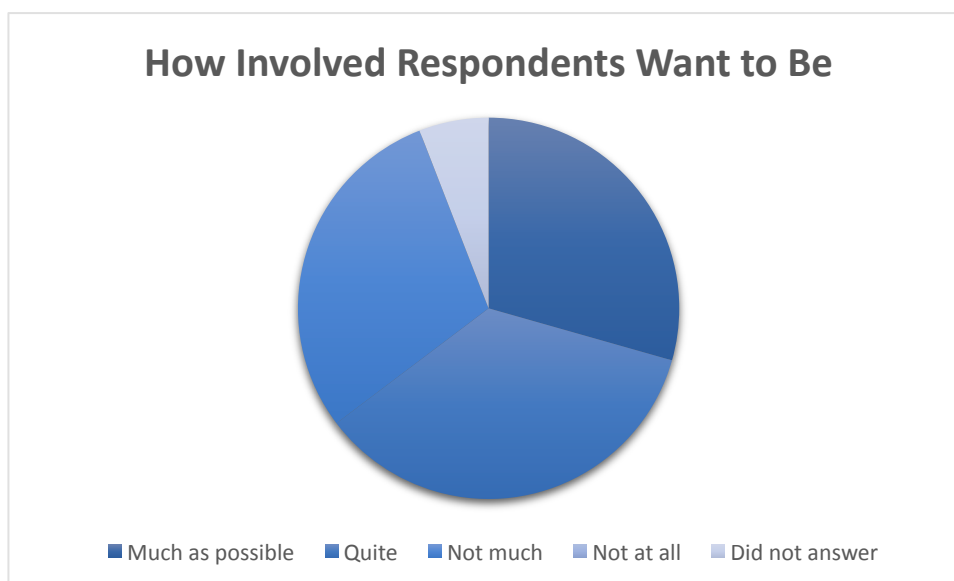
**Fig. 14: Support for a range of potential management options.**

Questioned further on the type of management supported by respondents (Fig. 14), it is clear there is a significant minority opposed to any controls or, in particular, any access restrictions. Recognition for the need for some form of management is again indicated, with the strongest support for the ‘soft’ management options of improved monitoring and time-sensitive access restrictions. Stricter restrictions on the potentially high-impact activities of motor traffic and tourism are also well-supported, but restrictions on researchers and residents are not. These views were reinforced by comments against strict restrictions, particularly those that keep local people from the area. For example:

“Restrictions should only be enforced where they are specific and where they make sense.”

“I would prefer to see restrictions that balance conservation with use, and that affect the residents of Svalbard least and last because it is their landscape.”

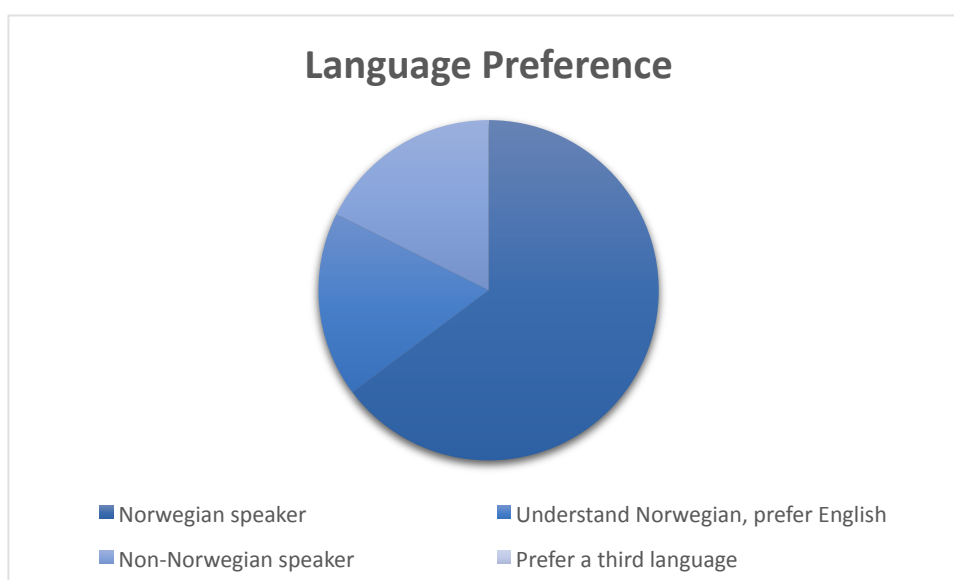
Matters of involvement in the planning process were then explored, with respondents asked how involved they would like to be (Fig. 15).



**Fig. 15: Support involvement in the planning process.**

The majority of respondents are in favour of some form of involvement, with significant support for as much as possible, which was suggested might include meetings and working groups, or for quite a high level of involvement, which was suggested as the level of public meetings. Optional comments revealed a wish to see and evaluate the options themselves, rather than have decisions made behind closed doors. Open and inclusive decision-making with the option of deliberative participation in the process of forming the New Management Plan for Central Spitsbergen is therefore recommended.

Finally, language requirements were addressed to maximise accessibility of any participation. Fig. 16 illustrates respondents' language preferences.



**Fig. 16: Language preference for participation in the planning process.**

While the majority of respondents understand Norwegian, there is an interested minority who would prefer communication in English. No requirement for a third language was expressed.

## **5. Conclusion**

Central Spitsbergen is popular with both residents and visitors, particularly for nature-based leisure activities. While there is recognition of the need to protect the environment, there are strong fears over the potential introduction of restrictions, especially those affecting access for residents. These fears can be addressed by open communication and two-way dialogue with citizens and other stakeholders, for which this consultation found strong support.