

Managing and maintaining Camden's green spaces

Survey findings report

1. Purpose

- 1.1 This report sets out the consultation process and findings for proposed changes to the Council's grounds maintenance offer. The offer includes options to provide quality green spaces across the borough at a reduced cost to the Council as part of its financial challenge.

2. Consultation process

- 2.1 The consultation ran for a period of six weeks from Thursday 17 September 2015 to Friday 30 October 2015 and a variety of methods (as below) was used to ensure it was widely publicised and that stakeholders had an opportunity to share their views.

Consultation information and online survey

- 2.2 Consultation information and an online survey was produced which outlined the reasons why the changes were being proposed and views were gathered on a number of options for how green spaces could be maintained in the future and how savings could be delivered. The closing date for the online survey was 30 October 2015.

Meeting with Chairs of Friends of Parks

- 2.3 The Cabinet Member for Sustainability and Environment, and Council officers attended a meeting with Chairs of Friends of Parks to discuss the consultation and seek their views.

Emails to key stakeholders

- 2.4 Emails were sent to key stakeholders (tenants, leaseholders, and Friends of Parks) to inform them about the changes to the grounds maintenance service and the opportunity to save money whilst ensuring that the borough's green spaces continue to meet the needs of people who use them. Stakeholders were invited to feed back their views to the online survey.

3. How else awareness was raised

- 3.1 In addition to using direct emails to residents, leaseholders and Parks Friends, and publicity on the Council website, awareness of the consultation process was raised in a number of ways, including:

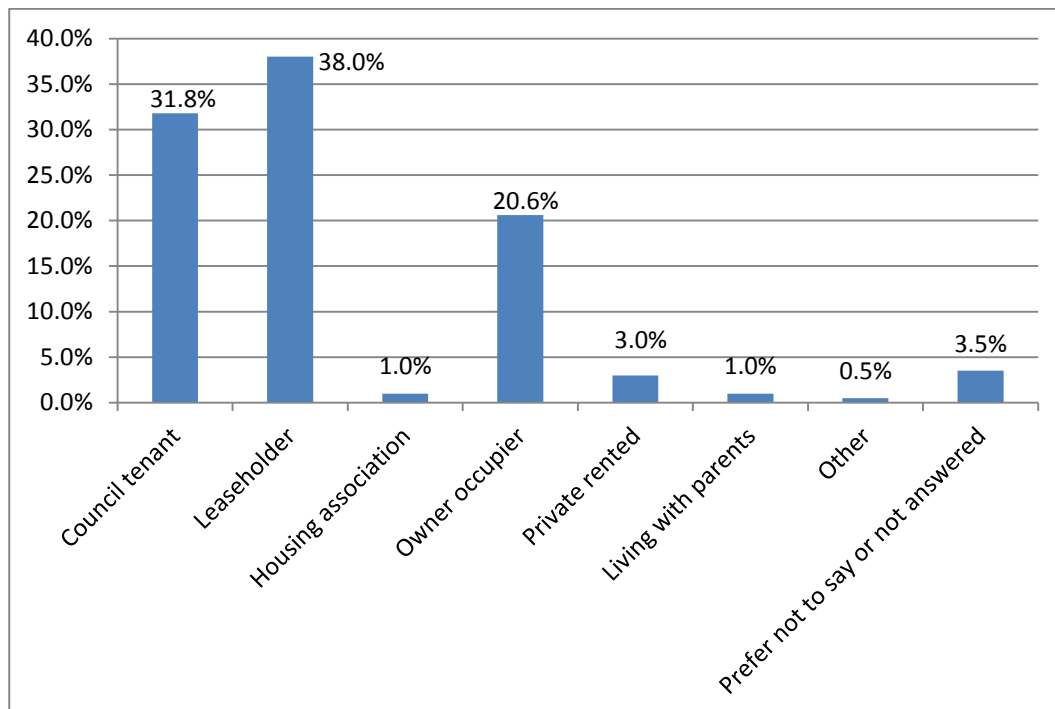
- Promotion through the Council's Camden magazine, which is delivered to all households in the borough. The October edition of the magazine included an article about the engagement exercise and highlighted how people can take part and submit their views.
- Promotion through Camden's twitter account to encourage people to find out more about responding to the Green Spaces survey at the Camden website.
- Digital screens at 5 Pancras Square in the library and Contact Camden floors to publicise the Green Spaces survey.

4. Who responded to the online survey

4.1 In total, 690 responses were received through the online survey. Of these,

- 38% were leaseholders, 32% were Council tenants, and 21% were owner occupiers (**see graph below for breakdown of housing tenure**);
- the vast majority of responses were from Camden postcodes while non-Camden postcodes accounted for less than 2% of the responses;
- the largest group of respondents by ethnicity were White British or Irish at 59%, with BME respondents at 13%. However another 13% did not state their ethnicity;
- 10% of respondents considered themselves to be disabled;
- more women than men responded to the survey, with 59% women compared to 40% men; and
- the majority of respondents were aged between 35 and 64, accounting for two-thirds of all the respondents.

Housing tenure of respondents



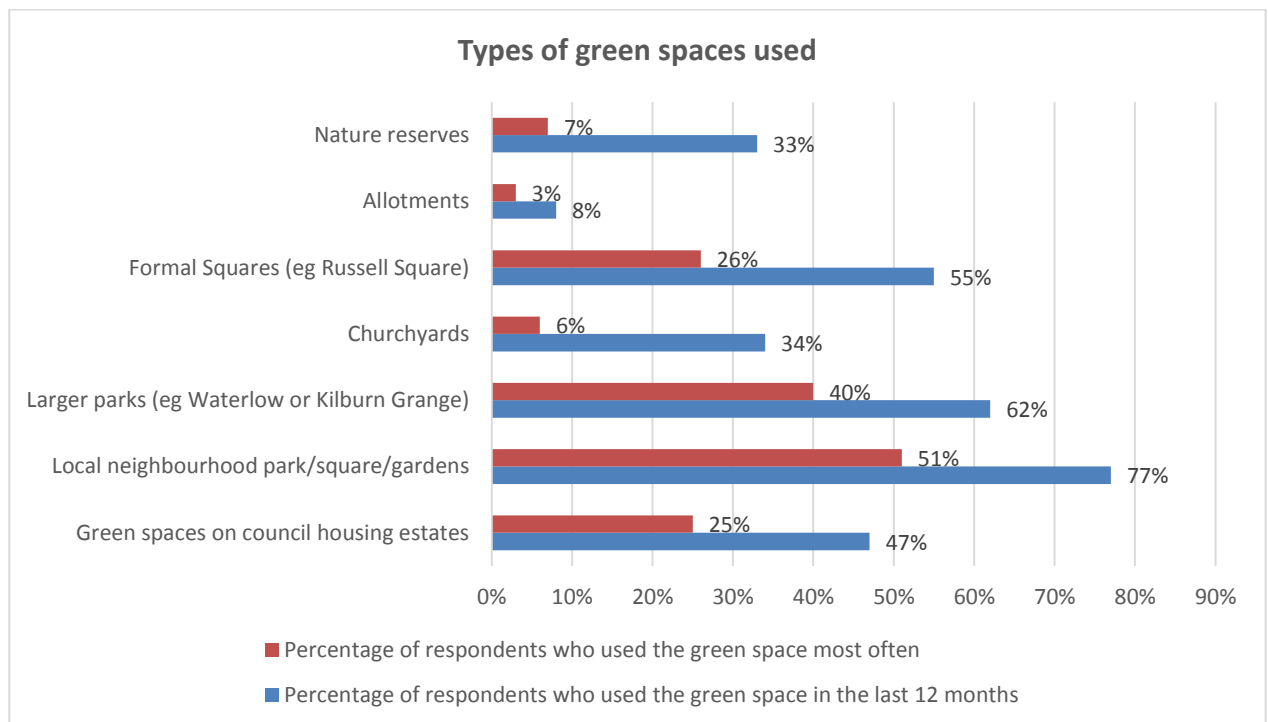
5. Responses to the survey questions

Types of green spaces in Camden that respondents have used in the last 12 months, and which green spaces were used most often

5.1 Of all the green spaces listed in the survey, the results indicated neighbourhood parks, squares and gardens in the local area were the ones used most often by over half of the respondents (51%). This was the type of green space that received the highest percentage of responses when respondents were asked to select the two types of green spaces they used most often. When respondents were asked which types of green space they had visited in the last 12 months, local neighbourhood spaces again received the highest percentage of responses – 77% of respondents said they used them.

5.2 The second most used green spaces were larger parks such as Waterlow Park or Kilburn Grange Park. 40% of respondents said this type of green space was one of two green spaces they used most often. Nearly two-thirds of respondents said they had visited larger parks in the last 12 months.

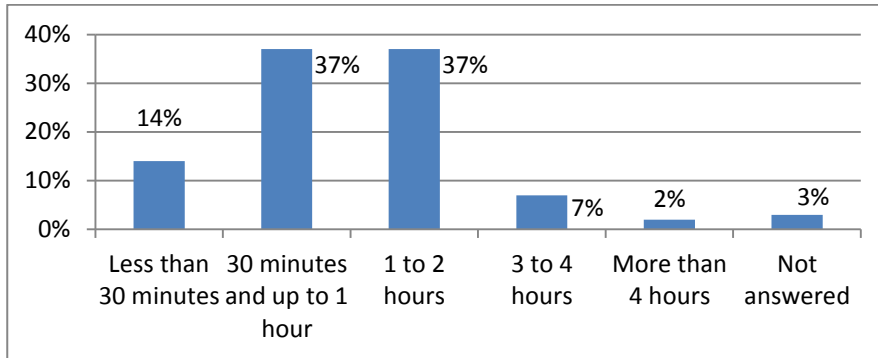
The graph below provides a breakdown of the types of green spaces respondents used.



Length of visits to green spaces

5.3 Respondents were asked how long on average they spent on each visit to the green spaces they used most. **The findings are presented in the graph below** and indicated that for nearly three-quarters of the respondents between 30

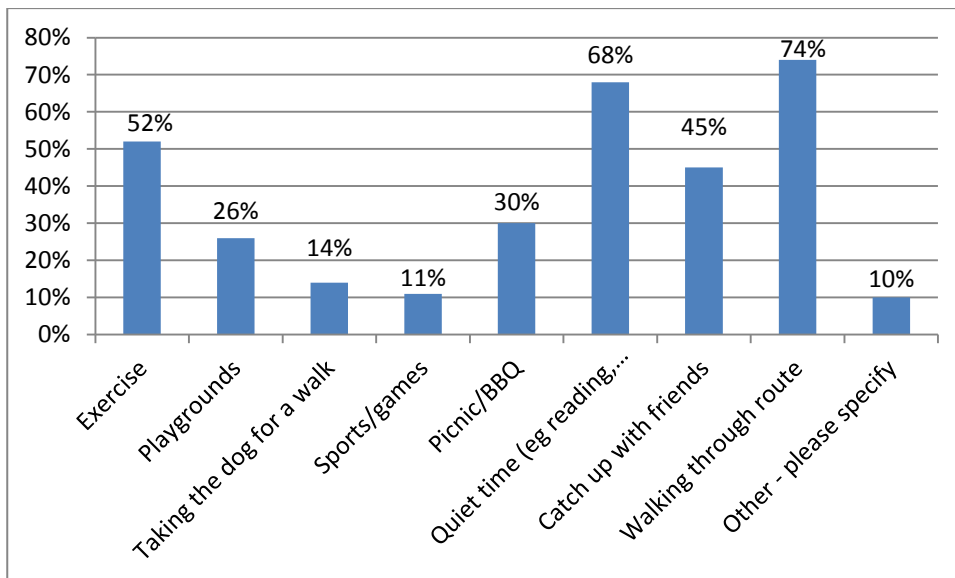
minutes to one hour, or between one and two hours were the average amount of time spent.



Activities undertaken when visiting Camden's green spaces

5.4 When asked what activities respondents carried out during their visits to green spaces, the two most popular activities were using a walking through route (which 74% of respondents said) and having quiet time (which 68% of respondents said). Other activities carried out were exercise (52% of respondents) and catching up with friends (45%). One in four respondents said they visited the green spaces for the playgrounds.

The graph below provides a breakdown of the activities undertaken by respondents when visiting Camden's green spaces.

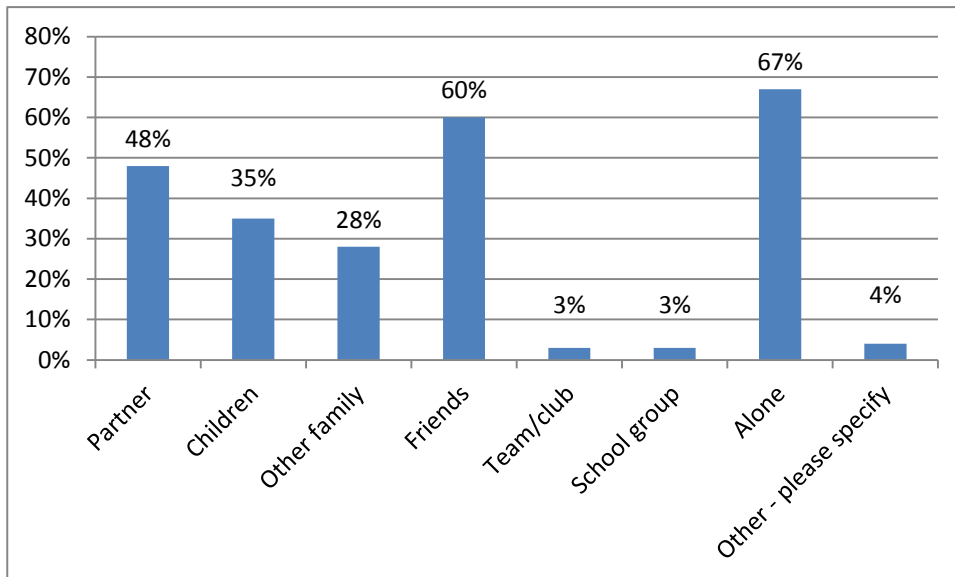


Who respondents tended to visit a Camden park/green space with

5.5 Respondents were asked who they tended to visit a green space with and 67% said they 'visited alone'. This was closely followed by 'with friends', at 60%. Over one third

of respondents said they visited with children, while just under 50% said they visited with their partners.

The graph below provides a breakdown of who respondents visited Camden's green spaces with.



Options for a new approach to horticulture

5.6 The Council's new approach to horticulture is to create sustainable and attractive planting across the borough's green spaces, ensuring the right plants are selected for the right places. Respondents were presented with a number of options for how higher maintenance features could be reduced in favour of lower maintenance planting and less intensively maintained areas to increase biodiversity and reduce costs. Respondents were asked for their views on the options.

5.7 The results are presented in the table below.

Options	Agree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Not answered	Total responses
Remove or reduce the amount of roses maintained and replace with plants that require less maintenance or costs	40%	39%	19%	2%	100%
Reduce grass cutting frequency in appropriate sections of parks to once a year	49%	35%	14%	2%	100%

Remove high maintenance formal hedges and replace with hedges that can be maintained using less intensive maintenance regimes	63%	20%	15%	2%	100%
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- i) **Remove or reduce amount of roses maintained and replace with plants that require less maintenance or costs** – The results indicate no overall majority of views, although further analysis indicated there was strong agreement from 13% of respondents compared with strong disagreement from 15% of respondents.
- ii) **Reduce grass cutting frequency in appropriate sections of parks to once a year** – The results indicate nearly half of respondents were in favour of this option, compared with 35% of respondents who were not in favour.
- iii) **Remove high maintenance formal hedges and replace with hedges that can be maintained using less intensive maintenance regimes** – The results indicate that nearly two-thirds of respondents were in favour of this option compared with one-fifth who were not.

5.8 Respondents were also asked to provide comments, and over 190 respondents provided them. The comments received were wide ranging, and included the following:

Roses – there was support for the aesthetic value of roses and how they ***‘put you in a better mood to start the day’***, and ***‘are a joy for many’***, to views that roses are low maintenance, ***‘roses only need pruning once a year’*** and how we could ***‘consider research on low maintenance roses for the urban landscape’***.

Grass cutting – there was support for the frequency of grass cutting to be reduced – ***‘Let areas of grass grow, stop cutting it all the time!’***, and ***‘I think grass cutting on estate green spaces is carried out much too often’***.

Hedges – one comment expressed support in seeing more hedging such as ***‘beech, hawthorn and holly’***, while another comment was ***‘please do not remove hedges’***.

Meadow-like planting and local wildlife – 50 comments were made about meadow-like planting and local wildlife. Of the comments received, the majority indicated support for this type of planting, particularly the natural look they provide to parks and how they support local wildlife ***‘wild flower meadows that attract birds, butterflies and other little creatures is easier on the eye’***, and ***‘sow wildflower sections’***. Another comment made was to ***‘consider the use of herbs rather than flowers’***, and ***‘use flowers that self- seed rather than have expensive bedding plants’***.

Community involvement – Over 30 comments were about involvement of the local community, from involving community groups and local residents to support Council staff to maintain open spaces, to getting a committee of retired people or stay at home mothers to get involved in planting days, and asking schools to grow plants in public spaces.

Preservation – Other comments received were in acknowledgement of the need to introduce low maintenance approaches but it was felt that it was just as important to implement them in a way that was sensitive to the preservation of the landscape and how the space is used by visitors and wildlife.

Overall, the general feel of comments received were around the issues of the importance of supporting and sustaining local wildlife and that potentially there would be sufficient interest from the local community to become involved in some aspects of green spaces maintenance.

Green space security

5.9 Respondents were asked to tell us about any issues/concerns they had experienced that made them feel unsafe in our parks and open spaces in the last three months.

5.10 One third of respondents either had ‘no concerns’ or did not make any comments. However, for those who did provide comments:

- 15% were concerned about **uncontrolled or dangerous dogs** not on leads with comments such as *‘big dogs not on leads and owners who clearly relish the fierceness of those dogs’* or *‘irresponsible dog owners with aggressive dogs off the lead’*. Another issue that was commented on were dogs fouling in parks;
- 8% of comments related to concerns about **people drinking alcohol**;
- 7% were in relation to **anti-social behaviour from gangs or group of youths or young adults**, which made some respondents feel unsafe or feel threatened as a result;
- The amount of **lighting** in parks was identified as another issue, accounting for 7% of comments made, where many responders stating that they would like to see *‘more lighting’*, particularly during the night. One response was *‘I would never walk through a park at night as they are usually not lit very well’*.

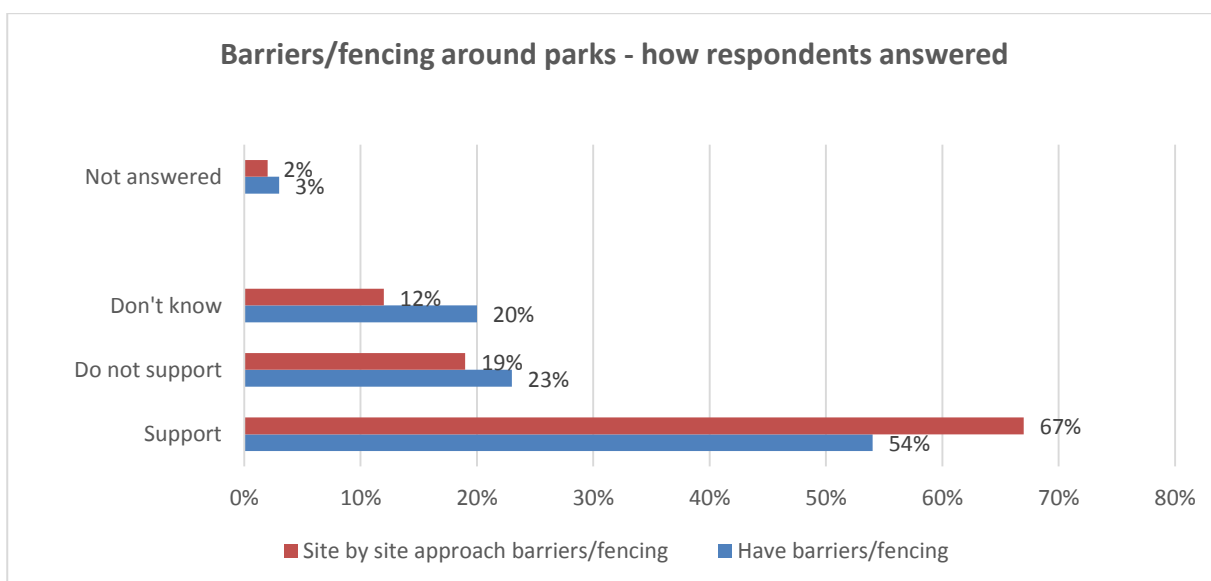
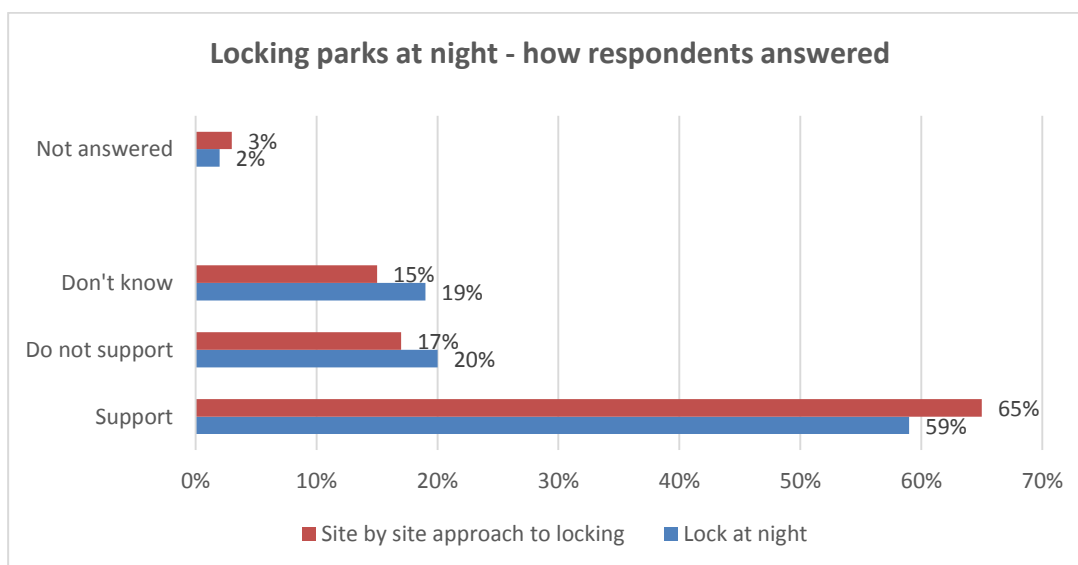
Locking at night and barriers/fencing

5.11 Respondents were asked for their views about locking parks at night and putting up barriers/fencing around parks. They were asked if they supported the idea of locking Camden parks, or having barriers/fencing around them, and whether they supported the idea of a site by site approach to locking at night and putting up barriers/fencing.

The results are presented in the graphs below, and indicate that over half of the respondents were in support of locking and having barriers/fencing around green spaces. Nearly two thirds of respondents supported a site by site approach to locking,

and just over two thirds of respondents supported a site by site approach to barriers/fencing.

The main issues faced in green spaces are antisocial behaviour and breach of Camden's byelaws, and the comments submitted to the survey in regards to locking and barriers and reflect respondents' concerns about the need to deter ASB. Park rangers and park attendants currently deal with the day-to-day issues and if necessary call parks security staff to attend a site to offer back up and support. The survey findings indicate a need for improved measures to be put in place to tackle antisocial behaviour in open spaces.



5.12 248 respondents submitted comments about locking at night and half of the comments were related to anti-social behaviour either in support of locking such as: ***“there would be more litter in the morning if left open”*** to against locking such as

“You can't stop people from entering a park. If they really want they can still jump over gates/fences”.

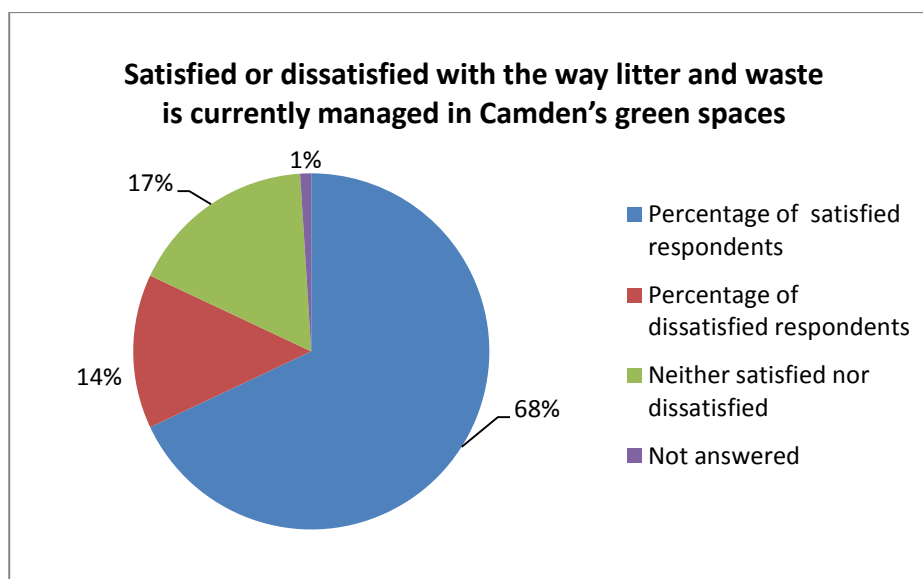
Other comments were about what would make respondents support keeping parks unlocked - ***“I would agree with such spaces being open at night if there was better security in place”.***

And another comment highlighted the advantages of keeping parks unlocked - ***“I'm torn between keeping them safe by locking up and being able to walk through after dark.”***

5.13 117 respondents submitted comments about barriers/fencing, and many comments were very general, and questioned the **cost effectiveness of using quality designed fences**. A total of 33 comments were made about using a **case by case approach** while eight respondents preferred **sites to be trialled first**.

Litter and waste

5.14 Respondents were asked how satisfied or dissatisfied they were with the way litter and waste is currently managed in Camden. Over two thirds of respondents said they were satisfied with the current approach, while 14% were dissatisfied. **The below chart provides a breakdown of the responses.**

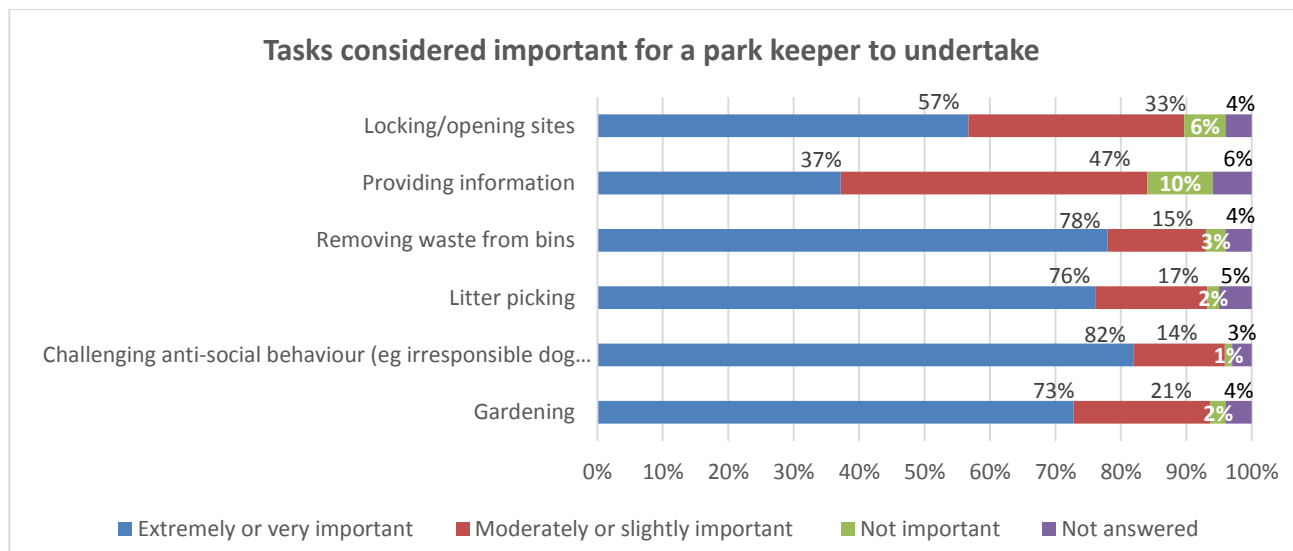


5.15 A total of 248 comments were received in relation to suggestions on how Camden might manage waste and litter better in parks. Thirty-six comments referred to **educating members of the public** not to litter in public spaces through campaigns, **displaying notices about littering to park rangers educating primary school children**. Thirty-four comments referred to **finer being introduced** whilst 26 comments referred to **more regular bin collections** of waste in parks to **reduce the build-up of litter**.

Ways of maintaining parks

5.16 Respondents were provided with a list of tasks and asked to indicate how important they thought the tasks were for a park keeper to undertake. The survey results showed that the four most important tasks were considered by respondents were challenging anti-social behaviour (82% of respondents); followed by removing waste from bins (78%); litter picking (76%); and gardening (73%).

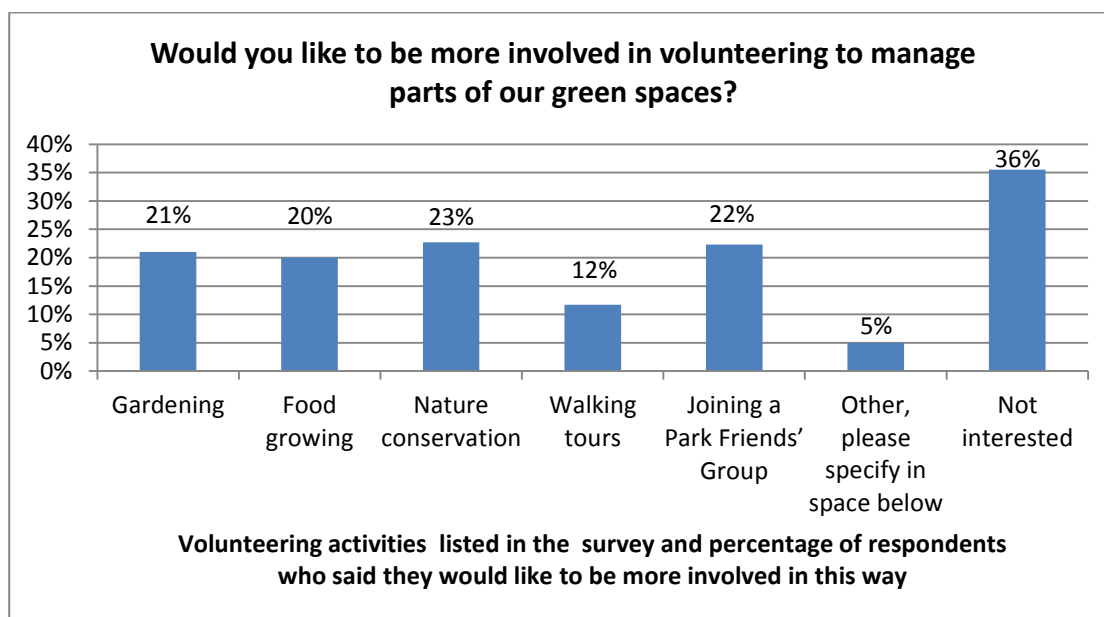
The graph below provides a breakdown of the tasks that respondents considered were important for park keepers to undertake.



5.17 Respondents were asked to provide **comments on how we can make the best use of parks staff and contractors' operatives on site**. Comments included the importance of the park keeper's role to protect wildlife within the park, maintaining health and safety in the park for users eg. secure fencing and trees so that injuries are avoided, multitasking eg. incorporating bin emptying into other roles, manage staff and motivate them to feel they have a personal investment into their green workplace, invest in young people's horticultural skills and develop better communication with contractors and Friends so that they work in partnership.

Volunteering

5.18 Respondents were asked if they would like to be involved in volunteering to manage parts of Camden's green spaces and indicate which activities they would be like to be actively involved in. Over a third of respondents were not interested in volunteering in Camden's green spaces. However, those who said they were interested indicated the following activities: joining a park friends' group (22%); nature conversation (23%); gardening (21%) whilst food growing and walking tours accounted for 20% and 12% respectively (this is based on people choosing more than one option). **The graph below provides a breakdown of the activities.**



5.19 When asked what **other activities respondents would be will be involved in**, they included litter picking/sweeping, deadheading roses and watering, food growing with children and youths, assist in running a café in Kilburn Grange, using a brush/rake to clear leaves without using a leaf blower.

Sharing information

5.20 Respondents were asked to tell us what additional information about green spaces and council-owned trees they would like to see on the website.

5.21 157 comments were provided and one-third of them were about trees. The comments about trees were wide ranging and included:

Publicising a schedule of works - so that residents could be informed about what was happening to their street trees, such as pruning or felling, or replanting. Comments included wanting to know the reasons for the surgery so that local residents could have a say in the matter.

Different species of trees – some responses were interested in the different varieties of trees in the borough and how that information could be available publicly. Others suggested different species could be planted such as edible fruit bearing trees, and other trees that encourage bee activity or pollination, such as hazelnut, walnut or chestnut.

Advantages of trees – some comments were about the benefits that trees provided such as making the city more liveable, good for the environment and making them look more inviting.

Disadvantages of trees – a number of respondents pointed out the hazards and nuisances some overgrown trees caused, such as blocking out natural light, trip hazards, and damage to the foundations of properties.

Other comments about trees included support for the work that the Tree Team were doing; involving local people in planting new trees; providing a better programme of maintenance for young trees; making it easier to report damaged or vandalised trees; and better care of trees by the staff when the tree is being pruned.

5.22 Apart from comments about trees, the types of green spaces information they would like to see on the website included:

Improved ways to report problems – some commented that contacting Contact Camden took too long as they were always kept on hold. A respondent suggested having an emergency phone number designated for Camden green spaces, while another resident suggested a Twitter account for Contact Camden or using other types of social media.

Other comments received asked for information about how to increase biodiversity and protect wildlife, eg. advice on feeding animals and waterfowl, publicising a database of vegetation and wildlife to encourage visits, and publicising opening and closing times of parks, as well as cafés in parks.

Any other comments

5.23 Respondents were asked to provide any other feedback about the grounds maintenance service and 187 respondents submitted comments. The comments were wide ranging and the themes are listed below:

Contractors – opinions about the current contractors were varied with some saying that they needed to show more care and be better skilled, and others who said that it was important to have good staff.

Dog fouling and dogs – comments were made about the need to do more to deter dog fouling, such as introducing fixed penalty notices, or making it mandatory for owners to bring bags with them. Another comment described the health hazards of returning home and finding out that the buggy wheels and footwear had been contaminated with dog poo.

Financial savings – respondents acknowledged that the council had to make financial savings and there was concern about the impact of cuts to services. Some respondents suggested the use of volunteers and involvement of residents “as a way forward”. Another respondent suggested putting on events to generate revenue.

Green spaces – the value of well-maintained green spaces was commented on by a number of respondents, from them providing health benefits and countering social deprivation, to their aesthetic qualities and making visits to them an enjoyable experience.

Leaf blowers – respondents commented on the noise that leaf blowers made and the harm they inflict on wildlife and young children. Some comments suggested the reintroduction of rakes and brooms as a more suitable alternative to sweeping up leaves.

Local involvement – responses included ways in which local people could get involved to create a sense of ownership and discourage anti-social behaviour. One suggestion was to contract a community organisation to undertake some of the maintenance works which volunteers could get involved in. Another suggestion was for the council to work more closely with tenants and leaseholders so that the maintenance works met their requirements.

Maintenance – many of the comments about grounds maintenance were on the importance of continuing to maintain green spaces because they were considered precious spaces and crucial to the well-being of residents. Other comments included the need to do more weeding on some local estates, and displaying information on noticeboards about forthcoming maintenance works.

Staff – the majority of the comments about staff were positive and were about the good work that they continue to do. A small number of comments were less positive and included the need for staff to be more friendly and to “improve the in-house service”.

Trees – comments about trees included a request to minimise surgery to protect wildlife, a suggestion to better monitor new planting to prevent future damage caused by roots, and the unsuitability of plane trees because of their allergenic properties.

Volunteers – while respondents expressed interest in volunteering themselves, others suggested that job seekers could get involved. Another comment was about the need to ensure volunteers were used for the long term, and not just as a short term initiative.

There were also other comments made such as about anti-social behaviour and how they make parks unsafe; litter and how more needs to be done to reduce it; planting, such as the need to ensure a balance of wild plants and cultivated plants, and the need to encourage more biodiversity.

Report Ends