

Report of the User Survey Undertaken in Dunwood Park – Summer 2013

Background to the Survey

This summer survey of 100 park users was completed during 16 days (3rd August 2013 until 18th August 2013) and utilised virtually the same questionnaire as the first winter baseline survey in November 2010 and the follow up summer survey taken during the same August period in 2011.

Both of the previous surveys were undertaken before the park was fully refurbished and in 2011 many areas of the Park were inaccessible due to restoration work. This year it was possible to conduct the survey throughout the whole length of the park. This in itself was a largely positive experience, engaging a greater variety of users and prompting many of the comments which reflect genuine appreciation of the work undertaken since the first survey took place.

The survey was conducted by volunteers from The Friends of Dunwood Park group, primarily face to face. However several forms were self completed as they were freely available on tables in the cafe, run by volunteers, during both weekends when the survey was taking place. Forms were completed by a variety of users of the park, undertaking various activities, unlike in 2011 when only the play park and bowling green areas were accessible, due to building work. It was easier to reach a wider range of users than previously, with larger families using the cafe, users of both the new tennis and MUGA pitches as well as regular walkers (with or without dogs), those attending events and those who just like to sit and watch park life. Even without the evidence of this survey, it is apparent that the park is now attracting far more users and that organised events are also bringing visitors to the park for the first time. Several surveyed said that they had been delighted by what they had found on a first visit and had returned or would be returning soon.

Only 6% of the respondents had completed the survey before so 94% were totally new views. All words in bold italics reflect actual statements taken directly from the survey forms and where % are shown in brackets these are the statistics from the 2011 summer survey given as a comparison.

Who used the park in summer 2013?

Two years ago 41% of those surveyed were under the age of 24 (very young children 0-3 were not included).

This had dropped to 19% this year, however it is believed that this does not reflect a drop in usage by this age group but rather that there were many more people to approach and more areas to cover with the survey. The survey did not concentrate on the play park therefore a wider age range was surveyed.

41% (35%) were aged between 25 years and 49 years and 39% (35%) were aged 50 and over.

The ratio of 41% (45%) male and 59% (55%) female probably reflects the great proportion of women with children using the park during weekdays and single women meeting and socialising in the cafe.

Of the 100 respondents just 3% (the same as 2 years ago) had a registered disability.

The vast majority 98% (90%) were white British with only 2 black or minority ethnic users surveyed. However these figures do not reflect the fact that BME use has increased e.g. pupils from an Oldham school who took part in a series of Forest School sessions in 2013, were all from the BME community.

Of those surveyed 79% had an OL2 postcode, so were very local but 4 came from Springhead, 5 from Royton, 7 from Newhey/Rochdale and 2 from Lees with one from Cheltenham with 3 who didn't give a postcode completing the 100 visitors.

Why do they use it?

Users surveyed were using the park for several of the activities on offer, often concurrently, therefore the numbers below are not percentages but reflect actual responses. Again results of the 2011 summer survey are in brackets.

Interestingly, this survey reflects a far wider usage and more activities so people are doing more whilst they visit and they even added activities to the form which had not previously been available.

24 (48) respondents were using the play park (not counting very young children)

65 (51) to walk

29 (14) to get some fresh air

15 (5) to keep fit

15 (19) ride a bike or scooter through the park

5 (10) regularly had picnics

19 (11) met friends and family for an outing

26 (32) respondents primarily used the park to walk dogs

20 (21) played sport or games, 3 (7) of whom were bowling and 2 playing tennis

7 (6) watched birds and wildlife

25 (22) enjoyed the flowers and scenery

11 (4) enjoyed the peace and quiet

10 (2) to just sit and enjoy it

Added to the survey form were:-

2 who regularly used it as a short cut now it was a safer place

14 who visited to go to an event

4 to use the climbing rock

2 to watch the trams

1 for conservation and volunteering

1 who comes to a class (Stitch in the Park)

The only activity not undertaken by any of those surveyed was feeding the birds or ducks.

How often do Users visit?

The majority are regular users, with about the same number as previously 30% (31%) visiting every day

41% (40%) weekly.

13 of the 41% actually amended the form to state that they came every other day or sometimes 2 or 3 times a week which might suggest that of the 71% regular users they are visiting more often than previously.

4% (9%) visit fortnightly

6% (4%) monthly.

10%(12%) visit less than monthly (mainly because of junior bowls and events taking part only at particular times of year)

9% (4%) it was a first visit, which may reflect that some survey forms were completed by visitors at an event on the last Sunday of the survey period, at which approximately 1500 young people and their parents attended.

How long do Users stay?

89% (90%) of users stay between 30 minutes and 2 hours
4% (4%) staying less than 30 minutes
7% (6%) staying more than 2 hours
48% (51%) regularly stay up to an hour
41% (39%) between 1 – 2 hours

These figures are similar to those of two years ago but reflect considerably longer visits than in the 2010 winter survey.

How do Users get to the Park?

Predictably, the majority of 58% (64%) walk to the park.
5% (5%) used push bikes
32% (28 %) drive
5% (3%) had arrived after using public transport .

What do Users like about Dunwood Park?

This section of the survey was free form and was well filled in with several listing a lot of things they liked about the park. The comments in bold italics are taken directly from the survey forms just as they appeared but are grouped into subject matters for ease of reading.

8 people said they particularly liked all of the improvements and others that it was **“good to see it being used again”**. Many commented on how clean and tidy the park was and that **“the groundsmen do a grand job”** and 14 stated that it was **“a lovely quiet and peaceful place”**.

Gratifyingly, many of the issues which featured in the disliked section from two years ago have now been transformed into liked issues.

- *Sporting Facilities*

“excellent sports facilities”

4 people commenting **“great tennis courts”**

6 on the bowling green being **“in very good order”**

8 particularly singled out the climbing rock.

The junior bowls and multisport facilities were equally popular

- *Appeal for Families*

“great for young children” (NB no changes have occurred within the play area since the last survey other than a small sand pit being added).

3 said it was **“easy for prams”**

3 particularly liked the play area **“good for toddlers in the play park”**

10 commented it was a safe environment, **“not near a road and kids can run free”**
2 valued it being **“flat for children on bikes”**,
Others that it has **“varied areas of interest and well set out”**, **“paths clean”**,
“freedom and space for kids and natural setting”

- *Other Facilities*

5 users liked the fact that **“parking is good”**, **“handy car parks”**, **“smooth paths”**, **“good for bikes”**

Others liked the **“cafe area and catering facilities”** with 5 of those surveyed commenting on **“the nice people in the cafe”** and **“clean toilets!”**

3 commented **“great space for dogs”**

7 on **“gardens really beautiful”**

5 liked that it was **“tranquil and well maintained”**

3 just wrote **“enjoy trees”**

1 user was **“impressed with steps to the river”**.

9 users commented on how clean it was, one specifically noted **“the lack of dog poo”** whilst another said **“except for the dog poo!”** and the rest said **“such a clean and tidy park”**

- *The ambience*

Scenery and location rated highly with 3 commenting on how **“picturesque”** it was and so **“rural in an urban environment”** other likes included **“few restrictions”**, **“not too big”**, **“not too overcrowded”**

4 people liked that it was **“litter free”** and **“tidy and organised”**. Several just stated that they found it **“relaxing”**, 5 commented on walks, particularly **“great woodland walks”** and 6 of those surveyed liked that the park was **“safe”** with 2 feeling it was a **“lovely place to sit quietly”** and **“a lovely setting”**, **“great to watch the birds”**.

Given that in the last two surveys the perception of a lack of personal safety was an issue this is a welcome comment and reflects not only the greater usage of the park throughout its length but also the fact that it is now much more open at the far end.

- *Social Interactions*

Several of those surveyed commented that it was a **“friendly park”** and comments like **“everything is so pleasant and it’s so nice to meet people”**, **“great to watch the general daily activity”** and **“other people are friendly”** and **“it’s good to meet so many different people”** show how much daily social interactions, particularly amongst the dog walking community, are valued.

- *Ease of Access*

Four of those surveyed particularly appreciated the convenience of having **“a lovely country park on their doorstep”** and this aspect featured largely in the later question about what difference does the park make to your life?

- *“Neat”!*

However, from over a hundred comments, some humorous others insightful and many often heartfelt, one stood out - the young man who simply stated that **“this park is NEAT”** with an explanatory note provided by the volunteer filling in the survey form that “Neat = praise in young person’s slang!”

What Users disliked!

This section was also free form and nearly half of those surveyed (46%) replied that they disliked **“nothing”**.

However three users were not so comfortable with the changes with one saying it **“now looks too pristine and (I) preferred it wild”** (but then conceding that **“overall it was generally nice”**).

Another disgruntled user stated that **“there are too many people – especially runners and bikes now it’s been refurbished!”**

And a third that **“it’s too near the tramline”**, which given that the train line had been in exactly the same place for 150 years seems a strange comment.

- *Drainage*

In previous surveys, the damp and unpleasant smell was commented upon but this was not mentioned at all this time.

Drainage is still a recurrent issue

2 people commented on **“sewers flooding on the bowling green”**

4 others on **“swampy lawn in the centre of the park”, “sloping flags inside the entrance which cause rain water to flood the bowling green (rockery gardens prevented this previously”, “ice on paths in winter due to insufficient drainage”** and that **“drainage in winter on paths seems worse since the park has been done up”**

1 user disliked the new central area saying that **“it not as good as it was as it’s all boggy and the circle has been lost”**.

- *Toilets*

Many users felt that the **“toilets need to be open more often”**

- *Dog Poo*

Others commented on **“dog dirt in play area”** and that **“the whole of the children’s play park (not just the equipment part) should be a dog free zone”**

7 users commented on the amount of dog poo in the Park, including one who elucidated with **“children’s’ shoes and bikes get mucky”**

- *Play facilities*

Disliked in the last survey, and still commented upon, was **“too much for younger children with the play area slanted to them”** but this is balanced elsewhere in this survey by those who appreciate it being a toddler and under five play area.

A recurring complaint was still about needing something for older kids **“one boulder is not enough”, “the centre grass could have been utilized better for older children”** and other suggestions included a wooden climbing frame and an adventure park. Another user felt **“the playground needs updating with tunnels, bridges and swings”**

- *Tennis / MUGA Courts*

2 visitors objected to the recently erected sign on the MUGA courts stating - 'no dogs allowed' - **“as it’s an ideal area to train dogs especially in winter and it’s strays that foul the courts and this could be prevented simply by keeping the gates closed.”**

Several commented that **“the sports area gets a bit cramped when used for various activities”, “the basketball court set up across 2 tennis courts makes it off putting when playing tennis and there are people on the multi-games course”**

- *Courtesy*

3 users commented on **“inconsiderate adult bike riders”** and there was evidence of tensions between some parents and dog owners **“dogs not on leads when children playing or having a picnic”, “too many dogs”, “one dog took a sandwich out of my child’s hand as it wasn’t on a lead”**

- *Misc*

An issue from the last survey was reiterated (but by considerably less users) in this survey as **“lack of shelters from rain”** and up on the top of the hill there was dislike about **“the top path, sheer drop and amount of dog dirt on it”**

Parking problems featured large in the last survey but now, apart from one user commenting on the difficulty of parking (at an event), they seem not to be an issue.

What Users would like to see in the Park

This is a compilation in answer to two separate questions **“Is there anything you would like to do here but can’t?”** to which 44% responded **“no”**

But one park user with a sense of humour wrote, **“lots but I am too old!”**

The other question was **“Is there anything that would improve the park which would make you use it more?”** to which 27% stated **“nothing”**.

Inevitably the responses, being free form, became mixed between the two questions and were very similar and repetitive so they are listed here together in topics.

In 2011 there were 6 main requests that came up repeatedly - somewhere to get a drink, decent toilets (with baby changing facilities), an older children's Play Area, somewhere to shelter, more seating and playthings in the body of the park.

The restoration work addressed some of these issues but the Friends Group used these comments to focus their efforts to providing additional facilities and last summer worked hard to provide a voluntary cafe on as many weekends as possible. This ensured that the new toilet facilities were available during some weekends – they are generally closed at weekends as Park Staff are not working and therefore could not monitor or open or close the facilities. The proceeds from the cafe were then used to purchase an additional bench for the park. Some items have recurred, albeit much less often, however having raised expectations of what can be achieved there are now more varied and ambitious requests for increased facilities!

Grouped under broad headings, the frequency of repeated suggestions for improvements include-

- *Cafe and Toilets*

17 wanted **“cafe to be open more often (especially during school holidays”, “somewhere to meet with friends with a cuppa”** and the comment that **“for (the) cost of the pavilion could put it to more use, cafe for walkers and every weekend and during the summer”**

15 requests were for the **“toilets open more regularly at weekends”,** with a **“particular plea for Friday afternoon and weekends”** and **“early morning or evening when dog walkers need them”** and **“access to toilets all the time, not only when an event is on”**. One user commented that they brought large numbers **“holiday club brings large group of children and ladies (toilet) not open at weekends”**

- *Woodland Play equipment for older children*

“more play equipment – kids adventure park in woodland/wooden climbing frame, organised activities, more things for older children to play on, adventure play park and “playground needs updating”

5 people wanted **“something for 6 –10 year olds”** and a **“wooden climbing frame (different shapes)”** was one suggestion with another response **“more to do for 11–18 year olds”**

- *More events and facilities - 5 suggested “more seating”*

4 responses were for more events and organised activities **“arts and crafts for kids more often”** and **“nature activities for kids”** and **“younger childrens organised activities”** topping the list

Other suggestions included -

“gravity exercise machines - and an adult play area next to kids so can keep an eye on them whilst we exercise”

Single requests were made for

“keep fit for new mums (ideal park for pram push)”

“sorry no bandstand, want to listen to bands”

“keep tennis nets up all winter”, “have a tennis club”, “floodlit tennis”

“putting green”, “paddling pool”, “bigger sandpit”, “fishing”, “a boating lake”, and “dog show” were also suggested.

- *General improvements.*

“flowers beyond the entrance”, “more flowering shrubs and bushes”

“keep paths clear of leaves”, “woodland still needs attention”

“thin out trees a bit more at Jubilee end”

“something to help (the)visually impaired navigate through the open spaces”

“bird boxes and feeding stations for birds”

“make something of water feature at bottom of steps”

“bit more light – street lamps or solar lights as dog walkers come in early or late when its dark”

Only one person requested **“shelter when it rains”** in this survey

- *Improved behaviour*

3 users mentioned inconsiderate behaviour by (adult) cyclists

“courtesy from cyclists – some cyclists are irresponsible, riding too quickly”,

“why don’t cyclists have bells on bikes or call out excuse me”?

There were two requests for dogs to be on leads and to **“ban dogs in the playpark area”**

- *Drainage*

2 people said the drainage needed sorting **“and fast before an accident happens in the winter”** and one person thought that **“flagstones put in upside down (roughside down) so slippery especially at Jubilee end.”** Another that it was **“too boggy on top slopes”**

- *Information*

Amongst the improvements which would make users use the park more suggestions included :-

“raise profile”, “more advertising” with 3 people suggesting **“better signage to cafe”** and **“signs especially from main road and to park generally”** and **“better parking at peak times”**

2 users read the new notice boards regularly and suggested a dedicated **“information site”** with one stating **“I tried to find out more about the history of the park from the web after the opening – to have a website dedicated to this would be good”.**

What should be preserved?

This section showed greater consensus with 23 stating **“everything”** – and a wish **“that it is kept looking as nice as it is now”** and **“I like it just as it is!”** being frequent responses.

Top of the preservation list, with 14 responses is still **“trees”**, particularly the mature ones and **“keeping a natural feel”**, with **“birds and greenery”** and **“woodland paths”** gaining support from an additional 7 of those surveyed.

13 wanted the commemorative fountain restoring,
4 the **“tennis courts”** preserving
single votes went to **“the climbing rock”**, **“the dragonfly sculpture at the beginning of the park”**, **“the train in the play area for children (and more features like this)”**, **“the cafe”**, **“wildflowers from last year”**, and **“the sense of safety”**.

2 responses were **“keep playground nice and small”** and one person wanted **“the historic entrance on Woodend with gatepost and balls restoring.”**

What difference does it make to your life?

The first verbal response was often **“a big difference”** and several people said **“lots”** before going on to list what it meant for them personally. All but one response was positive (this user stating that **“it was just a park like lots of other nearby parks”**). The most frequent response was along the lines of **“pleasant, peaceful and gives you a calm feeling”**

- Safety

2 users specifically commented it was **“a lovely safe place”** (one a 25-49 year old female) and another that they **“had stopped coming before improvements”**.

3 people mentioned safety from vehicles **“as a cyclist makes things much safer to use the park rather than the roads”** and another that it was a **“nice diversion from the main road, somewhere without cars”**

- Family Life

9 in total felt it **“enhanced family life and provided something social and sporting”** (junior bowls) **“gets us out with the family”**, **“enjoyable day out for children with lots of freedom”**, **“peace and quiet whilst toddlers on swings”**, **“good safe place to play – toddler really enjoys it”**, **“my 2 year old is spotting nature and enjoying it – great for entertaining children”**

Several others valued a place to sit and watch children play knowing they were safe. **“small children can safely run around”**

1 respondent who had an elderly parent living near the park said **“it really makes weekend visits more pleasurable for all the family now”**

- *Proximity*

6 felt ***“lucky it was on their door step”*** with one commenting ***“the park puts value on the house”*** and another ***“without this park I would move!”*** and another ***“I don’t drive so it’s ideal in bad weather to be able to get out for fresh air and exercise”***.

- *Well being*

9 other responses echoed fitness as a reason stating that the park provides a focal point for walks and for meeting people ***“for fresh air and exercise and to improve health”***, ***“ somewhere to look forward to going to,”*** ***“helps us keep in shape”***

4 particularly commented on the social side ***“friendly and have made friends”*** ***“pleasant place to sit and chat with friends”***, ***“can socialise - regular social contact with other dog walkers particularly valued”***, ***“would be lost without it as come every day”***

15 agreed that it made their ***“life more enjoyable – all year round”*** with others stating ***“can’t put a price on the therapy”***, ***“I love all the trees”***, ***“relaxation and peace”***, ***“lovely place away from daily stresses”***, ***“time away from work”***

2 users said ***“great place to come before work and after work”***
“a nice quiet space to come and clear my mind”

Other responses included ***“gets me out of bed on a Sunday!”***, ***“encourages me to get out and I feel as if I have really been out when I’ve been here”***, ***“it’s an escape”***, ***“calming experience”***, ***“like an extended garden - great outside space as I only have a yard”***

6 dog walkers valued its convenience, some that they could combine walking the dog with entertaining the children in one place and that the paths were good for prams as one grandparent commented ***“its somewhere to walk the dog and grandchildren too and I can manage the pram and let the dogs run”***

In Conclusion

The survey two years ago presented the views of users of the park who came despite all the many disruptions of restoration work, principally groups of teenagers, parents and grandparents using the play park, dog walkers and bowlers. These users either only used small areas of the park or only used it for one purpose.

The Summer 2013 survey reflects the views of a much wider cross section of park users who are using many more areas of the park.

Remembering that since 2011 considerable improvements have been achieved both in the physical restoration of the Park and in social provision e.g. cafe sessions and organised events, the survey responses now show less consensus with the views expressed being more varied and wider in scope.

100% Satisfaction

In the tick box section "Overall how satisfied are you with Dunwood Park" (with 5 options offered) **100% of users** ticked the **satisfied or above**. Of these 24% chose the option 'satisfactory', 28% choosing the option that 'it was good but has areas for improvement' with the majority, 48% , having no hesitation in stating that it was **"a really great Park"**.

This was the overwhelming feedback that the volunteers conducting the survey received, face to face, there were far more happy people than previously and a genuine acknowledgement of all the work that has been done by many people to both physically improve the park environment and also to develop the community of park users. There were no responses at all in the 'its terrible' or 'there are real problems' tick boxes.

From the suggestions for areas of improvement there are clearly still some problems with drainage and access to toilets to overcome along with the perennial issue of dog fouling. As more people use the park there is a need for tolerance between cyclists and pedestrians, dog owners (who value the chance to let their dogs run free in the play and woodland areas) and those with young children and toddlers who might feel threatened by this action. This is part and parcel of community life but overall this survey reflects appreciation of a picturesque country park, with good facilities which offer a great deal more potential and a park which is cared for and valued by the vast majority of considerate users.

Many valuable suggestions to enhance the user experience can now be seriously considered by the Friends of Dunwood Park in the forthcoming year.

The challenge for the future is to encourage many more people to become active Dunwood Park volunteers so that more of the ideas suggested during the survey can be realised. More volunteers could mean even more events and activities and more frequent cafes and (thus) weekend toilet facilities. And, by the time of the next survey, an even higher satisfaction rate!

(Data analysed and report compiled 10th January 2014 by Carol Hughes (Secretary of Friends of Dunwood Park))