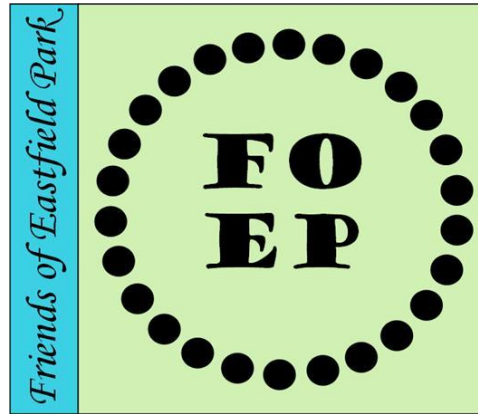


Friends of Eastfield Park



**A REPORT
on the
2012 PUBLIC CONSULTATION
about
PARK DEVELOPMENTS**

February, 2013

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INTRODUCTION

In 2008 the Friends of Eastfield Park published their 'Proposals for the Regeneration of Eastfield Park Northampton' in a document over 15,000 words long (FoEP, 2008). The document, which contained 23 proposals for improving the Park, was submitted to Northampton Borough Council for consideration.

At the time, some Councillors and Council Officers thought that the proposals could form the basis of a Development Plan for the Park. However, the FoEP were told that they would have to wait for the Council to develop its Parks and Open Spaces Strategy before any final decisions could be made about the future of Eastfield Park. When that Strategy was eventually produced, Eastfield Park was classified as a Neighbourhood Park and the FoEP were informed that the proposals could not be adopted in their entirety, or extensively, but would have to be implemented in a piecemeal fashion if at all.

Since then, some improvements have been made to the Park, notably in the provision of play equipment for older children and improvements to most of the Park entrances. However, in many respects the Park remains underdeveloped, even neglected. Parts of the Park are continually waterlogged, there are no paths running across the Park (which makes it difficult for many people to cross in wet weather), there is little provision for children and youth and a scarcity of basic amenities such as seats and information boards.

On the other hand, the Park is attractive and has a certain natural 'unspoilt' quality to it which people do not want to see ruined by the wrong kind of development.

Opinions seem to have shifted somewhat on a variety of issues since the 2008 proposals were written and, with the strong possibility of the Borough Council having funding to improve the Park in the near future, the FoEP wanted to discover what priorities local people would have for various kinds of development. It was therefore decided to issue a questionnaire at the 2012 FoEP AGM asking people what improvements they would like to see and what priorities they would give for several suggestions that had already been made.

THE QUESTIONNAIRE

The questionnaire (Appendix I) was first given out at the FoEP AGM in February 2012 and people were asked to complete it and hand it in during the meeting. Only 12 forms were returned during the evening and another one subsequently. The same questionnaire was therefore given out at meetings of the Eastfield Residents Association and the Lakeview Residents Association (with 'AGM' removed from the heading).

This resulted in only another five returns. A reply address was then added to the form and it was made available at subsequent FoEP events and the deadline for submission extended to the end of the year. Even so, only 26 responses were received during the whole year.

QUESTIONNAIRE RESULTS

Of the 26 people who returned completed questionnaires, seven live on the Eastfield Estate, six in Lakeview and three elsewhere in Eastfield Ward. Eight came from other 'neighbouring areas' (such as Boothville) and two from elsewhere in Northampton. The vast majority of people responding (21/26) said they visit the Park at least monthly and over half (14/26) visit it at least weekly. Interestingly, one person who responded and lives in Lakeview never visits the Park and is not likely to!

People were asked, "What would make you want to visit Eastfield Park more often? Twenty people answered this question but only 17 actually referred to Park improvements. Their comments are summarised in Table 1 below.

Table 1: 'What would make you want to visit Eastfield Park more often?'

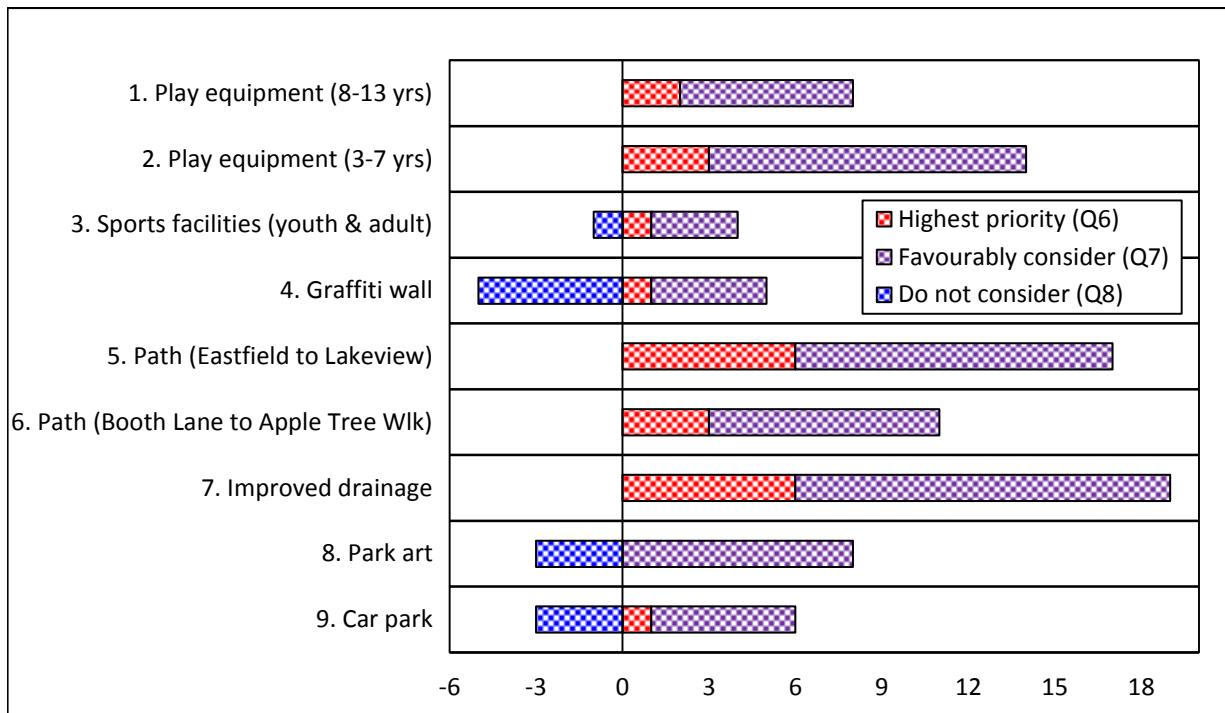
1	Play area for younger children as at Stanwick Lakes; Paths across the park - Honister to Skiddaw + Booth Lane to Apple Tree Walk
2	Footpath from Honister to Skiddaw
3	More seating
4	Younger children's play area; Footpaths
5	Less rubbish ; dog bin at south end of lake
6	Fewer louts about
7	Somewhere to sit
8	PLSO regular patrol
9	Events put on by RA
10	Hard-core path to lake
11	Tarmac paths for walking, running, jogging
12	Cleaner from entrance to park & more family events
13	If I felt safe
14	Greater use by other people
15	Needs cleaning in the woods - cans, bottles, rubbish
16	More sun, more seats
17	Less drug abuse & drinkers ; restoration of ponds & spinneys

Several of the comments in Table 1 (those in bold) relate in some way to antisocial activity. People feel intimidated by groups of people drinking alcohol in the Park and leaving their cans and other litter behind afterwards. Drug abuse does occur in the Park but alcohol consumption is a much bigger problem.

People were given a list of possible 'improvements' to the Park and were asked which **one** should have the highest priority. They were then asked which of the other suggestions listed should be favourably considered and which, if any, should not be considered at all.

The results from these three questions have been combined together and are illustrated in Figure 1. The lengths of the red bars above zero indicate the number of people giving a particular suggestion the highest priority; the lengths of the purple bars show how many people thought that that particular suggestion was a good idea, and the length of the blue bars below the zero line show how many people thought that a particular suggestion should not be considered.

Figure 1: Responses to Questions 6, 7 & 8 – Suggestions that should be given the highest priority, those that should be favourably considered and those that should not be considered at all.



Some suggestions, such as play equipment, footpaths and drainage, appear not to be controversial. People may disagree regarding the priority that the various suggestions should be given but all the respondents seem to regard them as good ideas. Other suggestions, however, are more controversial. Sports facilities, a graffiti wall, park art and car parking were all considered good ideas by some yet, in each case, at least one person thought they should not be considered at all.

Although ‘improved drainage’ seems at first glance to be the most popular suggestion, it must be noted that the ‘highest priority’ vote for paths is split between the two routes suggested. (This does not apply to the ‘favourably considered’ vote because people could make as many choices as they wished.) Overall, however, there are clear preferences for paths and improved drainage. More play equipment for younger children is a very popular suggestion; play equipment for older children less so. Provision of sports facilities for young people and adults was not a popular suggestion, with one person even saying that it should not be considered. A graffiti wall, park art and a car park are even more controversial.

People were also invited to comment freely about the suggestions but only 17 did so. Most of the comments (Appendix IIa: Q9) were about play equipment, particularly the need for equipment to be vandal proof and well maintained by the local council. Some of the comments noted the need for car parking but considered that it should be provided outside the Park such as on the land adjacent to St Gregory’s School.

Fourteen people suggested other ideas for improving the Park (Appendix IIb: Q10). Some of these (such as tidying the lake and surrounding area) are already being attempted by the FoEP; others (such as the provision of more seats, nature trails for schools and signs about heritage and wildlife) are high on the FoEP agenda. A few of the ideas (such as a café on the

park) are unlikely to be achieved in the near future and could prove controversial with some members of the public. There are some who want the Park left just as it is, 'unspoilt'. The issue of more patrols by the police and PCSOs is discussed in the next section.

COMMENTS & DISCUSSION

The results presented above include all 26 responses made throughout 2012. Nevertheless, the general trends were already evident in March, 2012, when only 20 returns had been made and Northampton Borough Council asked for the results of our consultation.

The FoEP informed NBC that the majority of people wanted better drainage for the Park and, consequently, a group of Council Officers met representatives from the FoEP in the Park to discuss the present inadequate drainage. However, the S106 Committee, which controls the funds available for these improvements, turned down the suggested improvements to drainage on the grounds that the financial outlay would not bring sufficient public benefit, but they would consider providing funds for a path across the Park.

Council Officers again met with FoEP representatives to discuss possible routes that the path might take and we still await the outcome from these discussions.

The FoEP are disappointed that the proposed drainage is not going ahead although we acknowledge that, in some parts of the Park, drainage may be impracticable. However, we would still like to see a full hydrological survey of the Park and its catchment carried out by professional engineers in accordance with our wishes in the 2008 '*Proposals*' document (FoEP, 2008, Proposal 4, a & b, restated in Appendix III of this document). Such a survey would not only investigate the causes of, and possible solutions to, the drainage problem but could also search for potential new sources of water for the ponds and lake, the previous supply of water to the ponds having been cut off by housing development. The investigations could, therefore, have considerable conservation value.

Without doubt, the construction of all-weather footpaths across the Park would be very popular with visitors. The choice of routes for such paths is likely to be more controversial.

A footpath from the Eastfield Estate to the Skiddaw Walk entrance to the Park in Lakeview would appear to be top priority. Opinion is, however, divided as to where this path should begin on the Eastfield Estate side of the Park.

A footpath from the Booth Lane entrance to where the northern end of Apple Tree Walk enters the Park would also be popular. Obviously such a path should not cut across the football pitches and should therefore follow a line close to the spinney north of the pitches. Most people also believe that paths should not cut across the parkland area north of the multi-use games area (MUGA) and west of the Bullring, so it would be sensible for the path to keep close to the northern perimeter of the Park in that area.

If a third path was made linking the Booth Lane entrance with the eastern end of Greenside, following the eastern (and southern) perimeter of the grassland, a complete circuit would be created following, more or less, the perimeter of the grassed area of the Park. Such a path would be of enormous value to joggers and dog-walkers.

All three of these suggestions were made by members of the public during informal consultations at public events on the Park during 2012. They were all also included within

the proposals made in the 2008 'Proposals' document (FoEP, 2008, Proposal 5, restated in Appendix III of this document).

Time and again, the vexed issue of anti-social and criminal activity on the Park was raised, both in response to the open ended sections of the questionnaire and in informal conversation with Park users. At the beginning of 2012 the situation, as revealed in the number of incidents reported to the police, seemed to be improving. However, in 2012 there were several cases of arson or attempted arson, and youths riding motor cycles on the Park became a major problem. Lower level anti-social activity such as litter and graffiti continued to be a nuisance.

Many local residents have called for an increase in patrols by police and PCSOs. The FoEP support this request but is also looking for other ways in which anti-social activity can be reduced. We want to see more people using the Park for legitimate purposes and are trying to encourage a variety of activities on the Park. Members are also directly involved in the 'Junior Wardens' scheme in local schools. We are taking the anti-litter message in to primary schools and Northampton College and want to be invited into secondary schools. Nevertheless, the more serious criminal activity does need to be dealt with by the appropriate authorities.

A new Park Ranger, Jason Toyne, has been appointed by NBC and he will spend part of his time in Eastfield Park. This is the first time that the Park has had somebody in this position and we hope and expect that Jason's activity will directly and indirectly help to reduce antisocial activity.

CONCLUSION

When the FoEP initiated the 2012 public consultation it was thought that it would lead to a thorough revision of the 2008 '*Proposals*' (FoEP, 2008). However, we do not now feel this is necessary, at least in the immediate future. The responses received, though limited in number, have served to confirm that the priorities for the development of Eastfield Park remain more or less the same as they were five years ago. Signs now point to the Park entrances (Proposal 1) and the entrances themselves have been improved (Proposal 2). A car park would still be useful, though not on the Park itself (Proposal 3). Proposals 4 and 5 have been referred to above and are still relevant as are the rest of the 23 proposals made in 2008.

The FoEP will continue to seek to implement the proposals as opportunities arise. We will also persist in our attempt to obtain public opinion over matters affecting the Park through our website and informal discussions at public events and, periodically, through structured questionnaires on various issues.

REFERENCE

FoEP (2008) *Proposals for the Regeneration of Eastfield Park Northampton*. Unpublished Document, Friends of Eastfield Park, 33pp.

APPENDIX I. The Public Consultation Questionnaire

1. Name:..... 2. Phone no. (optional):
Email address (optional):

3. Do you live in the NBC Eastfield Ward? Yes, on the Eastfield Estate
(Underline most appropriate answer) Yes, in the Lakeview area
Yes, elsewhere in the ward
No, but in a neighbouring area
No, elsewhere in Northampton
No, I do not live in Northampton

4. How often do you visit Eastfield Park? Most
days
(Underline most appropriate answer) Most weeks
Less than once a week, more than once a month
Less than once a month, more than once a year
Less than once a year
Never

5. What would make you want to visit Eastfield Park more often?

6. Which of the following suggestions should have the highest priority? (NB! Underline only one!)
1. More play equipment (8-13 year olds)
 2. More play equipment (3-7 year olds)
 3. More sports facilities for teenagers and adults
 4. A graffiti wall which can be decorated by local artists
 5. A hard surface path across the park from the Eastfield Estate to Lakeview
 6. A hard surface path across the park from Booth Lane to Apple Tree Walk (Kettering Rd. end)
 7. Better drainage of the wetter parts of the park
 8. Park art - modern sculptures and other vandal-proof art work
 9. A small hard surface car park built on part of the park near Booth Lane
 10. None of the above! (Make your own suggestions in the box below).

7. Which other ideas on the above list should be favourably considered?
(Enter just the number/s)

8. Which ideas on the above list, if any, should not be considered?
(Enter just the number/s)

9. Do you have any comments about the suggestions above?
e.g. the type of play equipment you would like to see installed

10. What other ideas do you have for improving the park?

APPENDIX II a & b. Responses to Question 9 & 10

IIa. Q9: Comments on the Suggestions:

Comments about play equipment in blue Comments about car parking in red
 Comments about paths in brown Comments about art in green
 Other comments in black

1	Vandal proof & minimum maintenance (play equipment).
2	Similar to Stanwick Lakes for little ones (play equipment).
3	Roundabout, swing, slide (play equipment).
4	Whatever is installed needs to be robust (play equipment).
5	I would worry if a car park was put on the park but not outside of the park e.g. St Gregory's Site (St Mary's old school site).
6	I think children like a lot of play equipment in one place as in Bradlaugh Fields. If a car park is built, there should be play equipment for 3-7 year not too far away.
7	Park art would be nice but not as important as other suggestions.
8	Vandal proof style (play equipment).
9	Robust vandal-proof play equipment for children up to age 13.
10	Any play equipment must have NBC funded preventative maintenance programme.
11	I believe a hard surface path should be built preferably from Honister Green to the children's play area at Lakeview.
12	For people to display art & craft; area for children - i.e. skipping, other activity.
13	Play equipment which is appropriate & sturdy but with a backup budget for maintenance.
14	Car parking is needed but should not be <u>on</u> the park.
15	Very useful for Motability scooters to gain access to park. Better upkeep of trees overhanging people's gardens & blocking day light.
16	Teenage facilities.
17	No car park at 'top end' where the pitches are; possibly converting Pigeon Wood for a car park.

IIb. Q10. Other Suggestions for Improving the Park:

1	Monthly <i>ad hoc</i> music groups. Couple of benches around lake.
2	Seats.
3	Use the St Mary's site for sports facilities / community centre / parking. Would be nice to involve St Gregory's School.
4	Trees with colourful blossom.
5	I like it unspoilt.
6	Café at certain days.
7	Water supply. Storage.
8	Tidying the lake & surrounding area.
9	Making bullring into small entertainment venue (with new statue).
10	Restore the lake to make it a visitor attraction.
11	I would like to see more regular patrols by police & PCSOs. They are definitely a deterrent.
12	More regular visits by community police so there is less likelihood of vandalism or other antisocial activity.
13	More signs about heritage and wildlife.
14	Better use of the park for functions (cf Racecourse), Nature Trails for Schools

APPENDIX III Proposals 4 & 5 from the 2008 'Proposals' Document¹

Proposal 4a: A new and improved land-drainage system should be installed in the area between the Lake and the Skiddaw Walk entrance, and in other parts of the Park prone to waterlogging.

Proposal 4b: A hydrological survey of Eastfield Park and its catchment, including both natural drainage and constructed drains, should be commissioned, primarily to identify possible water sources that could be used to supply the ponds and Lake, but also to comment generally on patterns of water flow and drainage in the area. This survey should also report on whether or not there is any possibility of reinstating the original water supply to the ponds. Outflows from the Lake and ponds should be raised and kept clear of debris and in a good state of repair.

Proposal 5: All-weather, wide, wheelchair friendly, footpaths should be constructed in the Park as follows:

- i. A cross-park path
- ii. A perimeter path
- iii. A path around the Lake
- iv. A path forming a circuit through the Wildlife Appreciation Area.
- v. A short path near the southern end of Apple Tree Walk forming a smooth link with Greenside.

¹FoEP (2008)