

Fortune Street Park Improvements: public engagement summary report

Background

Fortune Street Park has been allocated a total of £590,000 for improvements. Situated in the Bunhill ward, this thriving pocket park is in a busy and built-up part of the city and is sited next to two schools, Prior Weston Primary and Richard Cloudesley School. It is very well used by the local community, including school children and parents, people living or working in the area and people passing through, and needs investment to better meet the many competing demands that are placed upon it.

This project got underway in 2021 when the Parks Department appointed landscape architects Davies White to design improvements for the park based on a design brief that was written in conjunction with Parks Department staff and the project steering group, comprised of local stakeholders. The brief outlined the following objectives:

- to rationalise the layout of the park and make it more welcoming and accessible to a wide range of users
- to improve the entrances and first impressions of the park
- to install a pop-up power point to support community events and improve water supply for maintenance
- to enhance the park's ecology and biodiversity and implement a comprehensive planting strategy in line with the park's Site of Importance for Nature Conservation (SINC) status. To this end the improvements should protect and nurture the park's house sparrow habitat by including more shrub planting and long term improvements should be made to the quality and maintenance of the lawns.
- to improve the park's waste management and recycling facilities

A park user survey was also carried out between August and September 2021 to find out how people used the space and how they might like to see it improved. The survey had a good response rate with over 400 park users submitting feedback. Key priorities identified as part of this process were more seating, improved biodiversity, better litter management and a redesigned play area, including more play value for older children. This feedback and the initial design brief have been used by Davies White in developing the concept design for the park.

Aims and objectives of the public engagement sessions

The public engagement period on these proposals ran from 14 November 2022 to 6 January 2023. The aim of the public engagement was to allow feedback and comments on the concept design for the improvements and to understand what the immediate priorities for investment given that it might not be possible to deliver all the improvements due to budget constraints.

The information received from this exercise will help to refine a final design in spring 2023, enabling a contractor to be appointed and works starting on site in autumn 2023.

Public engagement approach and methodology

We engaged with the public via:

- an evening public Zoom session
- a leaflet/letter drop including a return envelope for responses
- an in-park engagement event
- our website
- a survey
- an email inbox (fortunestreetpark@islington.gov.uk)

In-park engagement event

A public engagement event was held in Fortune Street Park on Tuesday 29 November from 3 – 5pm to provide an opportunity for the local community, including parents, carers, and children of the local schools to give their feedback about the proposals. The event was hosted by the Parks Department, including the Project Manager Lara Ellington-Brown and the Area Park Manager Andrew Hillier, alongside landscape architects, Davies White. During the event, a total of 47 paper copies of the survey were handed out and the team spoke to approximately 15 people about the plans, which were on display, initially outside in the park and then in the foyer of Prior Weston Primary School when it got too dark.

Online Zoom session

A public Zoom event was held on Tuesday 6 December from 7 – 8pm to provide a further opportunity for the local community to give their feedback about the proposals. This session was hosted by Lara Ellington-Brown, Parks Department Project Manager and co-facilitated by the Assistant Area Parks Manager, Andrew Hillier and landscape architects Davies White.

The free event was ticketed and hosted by the event platform Eventbrite. A total of five people registered to attend. Attendees were sent a link to join on the evening, however they also received automated emails from Eventbrite leading to confusion over how to join the event.

The event began at 7pm and one attendee joined the session at 7.20pm reporting that they had received several emails from Eventbrite with incorrect joining information. An attempt to contact the other registered attendees was made, apologising for the inconvenience, and reposting the link so that people could join. The session commenced at 7.25pm but no other attendees joined. Another attempt to contact the attendees was made the following day and although one person replied and explained that they had had trouble joining, there was no response from the other registered attendees.

Despite the low attendance rate, the Zoom session went ahead and began with a short introduction from the Project Manager before moving on to a PowerPoint presentation by the architect, explaining the proposal. The presentation, which was also available to view on the council website, included information on the engagement to date and explained the site constraints. Afterwards, the attendee fed back their comments on the proposal and asked questions which were answered by the design team. These questions and answers are appended to this report.

Leaflet distribution

450 engagement leaflets were distributed to the local residents in the Bunhill ward and in the neighbouring borough of City of London on the 13 November 2022. A map of this area is appended to the report. The leaflet contained images of the design, information explaining the proposal and signposting people to the website, a paper copy of the survey and a return envelope for people to send their completed surveys back.

Website

The proposed design, information about the project and a link to the online survey with a deadline of 6 January were published on the Fortune Street Park project webpage on the council website. A link to a video of the architects talking through the proposal was also provided on the page, alongside details of the engagement sessions.

Survey

A total of six questions were included in the survey. The deadline for receiving feedback via the online survey was set as midnight on 6 January 2023, allowing eight weeks for responses to be submitted. The same deadline was given for paper returns, but we continued to accept postal surveys received after this date, due to postal strikes, until 20 January 2023.

The survey asked the following questions:

1. How often do you usually visit Fortune Street Park?
2. Who do you normally visit the park with and what do you do while you're there?
3. How long do you usually stay when you visit the park?

4. What are your thoughts on the proposed improvements for the park? Please tell us what you like and what you don't like about the proposal.
5. The budget for this project is limited and with the changing financial markets we may not be able to deliver all the improvements. If we could only develop a reduced version of the proposal, which three elements of the design would you choose to take forward? Please rank these in order of preference 'first', 'second', 'third'.
6. Do you have any other comments?

The online survey was publicised via the council's website and social media channels and was posted on NextDoor and in the City of London's weekly online newsletter for Barbican residents.

For the online survey, it was possible to put controls in place to ensure people answered the questions appropriately. For example, making questions 'mandatory' meant that they had to answer a question before moving on to the next, while the preference question (question five) meant people were only allowed to select three options which were automatically ranked in the appropriate order. It was not possible to implement these same controls with the paper survey and 13 respondents simply ticked the relevant boxes without confirming their order of preference. For the purpose of this report, where this happened, we have not assigned rankings to respondents' answers but have noted them and used them to gain a wider insight into people's priorities.

Another important note to make about question five is that due to a discrepancy between the paper and online survey option, 'other' was provided on the paper survey but not on the online version and this meant that 12 respondents provided an answer here that deviated from the list of options that had otherwise been provided. This data has been collated and included here as additional information.

Fortune Street Park e-mail inbox

A number of people contacted the Parks Department by email in order to comment on the proposals. Comments from those emails submitted within the feedback window have been analysed as part of this summary document.

Responses and feedback

As described above, information and feedback from residents and park users was gathered using three main sources:

- a dedicated email inbox
- two public engagement events
- a Survs online survey

In total we received 126 responses comprised of:

- 51 online survey responses
- 59 postal survey responses
- 15 email responses via the Fortune Street email inbox. These have been analysed as part of the overall feedback.
- 1 item of in-person feedback from the online Zoom event

Survey feedback

The purpose of survey questions one to three was to find out how respondents use the park currently and the responses have been quantified for the purpose of this report. Question five has also been quantified but given the discrepancy between the online and paper survey for question five and the fact that several respondents didn't rank their choices in order of preference we have taken their choices into account but not included them in the official figures.

Questions four and six are organised into three categories and have been defined as the following:

1. Positive responses – These responses are defined as being supportive of the proposals and used positive language to describe the proposal. The responses sometimes included suggestions for design changes but in the main were explicit in their support of the scheme.
2. Neutral responses – These responses did not definitively describe support or objections to the proposal. The responses contained questions as part of the submission and sometimes included suggestions for design changes.
3. Negative responses – These responses explicitly objected to the proposals and used negative language to describe the proposals.

This method of organising responses gives an overall sense of the views of those who submitted their comments and helps determine general attitudes about the proposals.

In addition to the response categorisation, the main themes of the responses to each question were then extracted and are listed below as part of the qualitative analysis.

Lastly, any feedback specifically about the design or suggestions for design changes were filtered out and listed below each question, where applicable.

Analysis of question 1: How often do you visit Fortune Street Park?

This question received 110 responses:

- 36.4% visit 2 – 4 times per week

- 34.5 % visit daily
- 9.1% visit 2 – 3 times per month
- 6.4% visit once a week
- 3.6% visit one a month
- 3.6% visit occasionally (3-11 times per year)
- 2.7% said they didn't know or couldn't remember
- 1.8% visit rarely (2 or less times per year)
- 1.8% never visit

Analysis of question 2: Who do you normally visit the park with, and what do you do while you're there?

This question received 110 responses and analysis has been split into three parts. In response to 'who do you normally visit the park with':

- 28% didn't say
- 23% visit alone
- 17% visit with family
- 17% visit with friends
- 15% visit with children

In response to 'what do you do while you're there', respondents often explained that they visit the park for several reasons and the following breakdown has been provided here:

- 23% use the park as a through-route
- 21% visit to have coffee
- 9% to use the playground
- 9% to sit
- 7% to relax
- 5% to read
- 5% to chat
- 3% to have lunch

- 3% to walk
- 2% have a picnic
- 2% watch nature
- 2% to meditate
- 2% visit to lock the park
- 1% to stop and rest
- 1% to collect kids from school
- 1% to fly a drone
- 7% didn't say

As part of their answer, some respondents made general observations about the park or took the opportunity to report issues. These have been sorted into headlines and themes below:

Headlines and themes from question 2

As part of their answer, some respondents made general observations about the park or took the opportunity to report issues. In the main, people value the park and enjoy spending time there but feel it could be improved with a few enhancements, or some 'tender-loving care'. Key issues and comments were:

- That there is a lack of seating which stops people being able to spend time in the park
- Poor facilities and lack of general maintenance prevents people from visiting more
- The park is dirty
- Too many children use the park
- The park is much loved and 'just needs updating'

Lack of seating was a key issue raised with respondents saying that there is not enough space to sit in the park at present. Others said they would visit the park more if the facilities were upgraded and the park was better maintained, while another commented that they feel the park is dirty. Some respondents feel that too much of the park is given over to children with not enough space for lone visitors, or those without children, who want some space to relax. Others commented that they like the park as it is but agree that it could do with some 'updating'.

Analysis of question 3: How long do you usually stay when you visit the park?

This question received 110 responses:

- 29.1% stay between 30-60 minutes

- 20.9% stay between 15-30 minutes
- 19.1% stay less than five minutes
- 15.5% stay between 5-15 minutes
- 11.8% stay between 1-2 hours
- 3.6% stay for more than 2 hours

Analysis of question 4: What are your thoughts on the proposed improvements for the park? Please tell us what you like and what you don't like about the proposal

This question received 121 responses.

- 47 positive responses
- 48 neutral responses
- 26 negative responses

Examples of positive responses

"I appreciate the measures proposed for improving biodiversity, and the seating overall. I am satisfied with all elements of the proposal."

"I like the proposal to add a path on the north side of the park and also appreciate that no trees will be removed. The idea to use timber furniture is great, as is the bird-proof bin design."

"I think that overall the proposals are good. The extension of the pathway along the north side of the park makes sense to relieve congestion and improve flow around the park."

"I think the proposed improvements for the park is necessary and useful... it is not about what I like or don't like about the proposal, but I advise that you do what is important for the community taking into account the space of the park etc."

Examples of neutral responses

"The park is good as it is. The disturbance is from the school taking it over during pickup times, and also from office workers during lunch time leaving a lot of rubbish. Otherwise any small improvements would be much appreciated. Still - a too strong makeover would probably suffocate the place. It's quite a small area for so much activity. there are quite a lot of trees already but it seems difficult to harvest them, apples, cherries etc".

"I like more plants and trees."

"They look alright. What is going to happen to the picnic tables?"

“Seems fine. My main issue with the park currently is maintenance. It looks very shabby and grassless. Not inviting.”

Examples of negative responses

“The proposed northern path is not only unnecessary and a waste of money, it would have a negative effect on biodiversity, ruin some of the habitat of the Park’s small birds and take away both a valuable play space for children and customers from GiddyUp. If extra space for movement is required, this can be better achieved by decreasing the size of the children’s play area along its southern boundary.”

“I think the new path is a waste. There are lots of paths in the area. We should prioritise maximising the amount of green space rather than paving over more grass. Given the limited space for the playground, hemmed in by the trees, where possible, you should install multi-storey play facilities. That is, use the vertical space if the horizontal space is constrained.”

“Don’t like the over-focus on children’s spaces.”

“Too many roles in too little space. Treat it as one, and to one idea, rather than as gathering of different and uncomplimentary elements. It looks a mess now and it looks as though it will continue to look a mess and be unappealing.”

“The present proposals go nowhere near resolving the issues identified and (like previous landscape renewals in the last 15 years) are destined to fail after a short period. I consider its "back to the drawing board" if this work is to be effective. However, aspects of the present proposals that seem to me worth keeping are: creation of a new path along Fortune Street; additional seating and litter bins (though I predict the design of bin illustrated will be inadequate). Aspects which I consider will not be an improvement but an impairment from my point of view are: designating the cafe to the rear of the cafe itself which will mean it serves the Whitecross Street lunch crowd rather than the cafe customers. It may tend to jeopardise the viability of the cafe which is a great asset to the park, but is a marginal business. The amenity of the cafe area should be improved. The decision not to remove any trees. The central London plane is too large and should be removed and replaced with a more suitable species; the invasive and almost certainly self-sown Ailanthus beside the Golden Lane entrance prevents grass and shrubs and the fine lime street from flourishing over the whole W end of the park due to its dense leaf canopy and should also be removed. Squeamishness about removing unsuitable trees is misplaced.

“Aspects of the park which are ducked [sic] wholesale by the proposals are: the lack of robustness of the landscaping; the importance of the main path as a pedestrian through route from E-W. The pavements of Fortune Street are so narrow and badly encroached by planting (from the park and Peabody gardens) that they are single file. The path through the park should be wider and straighter and recognised as a main access to a local shopping street. The use of the lawn as a ball pitch. This is quite unsuitable in such a well-used small park and most intimidating to other users, especially the elderly and infirm. It should be clearly discouraged by breaking up the large lawn with paths and planting. “The low standard of management and maintenance by LBI who fail to collect litter, manage the soft landscaping, enforce the no dog rule or lock the park at night.”

Headlines and themes from question 4

In the main, respondents were supportive of the park being improved and felt that most of the proposals provided an opportunity to do so. About the creation of a new path along the northern perimeter of the park, 26% of respondents took the opportunity to assert either support or their objection to this element. Of this number, 38% support a new path, while 62% do not. Key objections to the formation of a new path are that:

- It is unnecessary given that the park is only congested during school drop-off and pick-up times. Moreover, some people feel that the congestion is not as much of an issue as it once was and no longer represents a problem needing to be solved
- It will increase the amount of hardstanding in the park
- It will remove an amount of established and mature habitat
- The area is well-used as a natural play area by children (often referred to as a 'secret woodland') and removing this will lead to a significant reduction in play value
- The money that would be spent on this would be better spent elsewhere in the park.

Unlike critics of the new path, respondents who support it were less inclined to state why they support it. A few references were made to it easing congestion, with some people saying that they felt it 'made sense' to create a new path here while others suggested improvements that could be made to the existing paths, such as widening the one outside of the school.

Other key themes identified from the feedback:

- Significant support for additional seating though should be noted that a small number of the submissions are concerned about how more seating might lead to an increase in noise and anti-social behaviour and urged the council to consider the siting of any new benches
- More toilets are needed
- The coffee shop is well-loved and must be retained
- Support for the retention of all trees. However, a small number of submissions said that this should be reviewed given the park's dense tree population
- Several respondents suggested that the money would be better spent on maintaining the park as it is, rather than undertaking a transformative improvement scheme. Respondents feel that the park is not maintained to a satisfactory standard and argue that a dedicated maintenance regime would improve the standard of the park and enhance people's enjoyment of the space
- Similarly, a small number of respondents said they felt it would be more appropriate if the funds were put towards other council services, given the current cost of living crisis
- Widespread support for more bins but this was also heavily caveated on whether they would be emptied regularly. Many respondents commented that the bins would be filled quickly given the number of people who use the park

Question 4 design-focussed feedback

- The proposal offers too many roles in one space
- Concerns that the composting area will be a waste of money as the previous one was used for litter and dog waste and had to be removed
- There should be no reduction in the size of the children's playground
- The proposal isn't clear in illustrating the plans for the children's play equipment
- There needs to be more play value for older children and adults
- The toddlers' swings and seesaws need refurbishing
- New play equipment should be made of natural materials
- The climbing frame and basket swing is very popular and should be retained or replaced like-for-like whereas the petal (referred to as the flower rocker in the presentation and marked for refurbishment) is not used very much
- There used to be a tyre swing on a tree near Richard Cloudesley that was taken down during lockdown. This should be reinstated as it was very popular
- Gym equipment should be included
- Opinion over the use of the lawn for football is divided. Some respondents feel football games should be prevented by breaking up the lawn with paths and planting while others said it was important that any new planting shouldn't obstruct games
- The park is too small and more space needs to be created. This could be achieved if Fortune Street itself was incorporated into the park
- The plans for the stage are a waste of money and should be reconsidered. Opinions here ranged from the idea that it would clutter the space and disrupt activities such as football, to those who feel there is no demand for a stage and others who felt it should not be a priority given the limited funds available
- The soft landscaping needs to be robust and the current landscaping proposals are not robust enough
- If plans to implement a new path go ahead it will lead to a desire line being created across the lawn
- Several requests for a water fountain to be included as part of the design
- Concern about the suggestion to introduce musical instruments or 'noisy' play equipment. While some respondents welcomed this suggestion, most comments relating to this proposal were worried that this would lead to an unwelcome increase in noise

- The proposal should include lighting
- Plans to create a 'café garden' are on the wrong side of the café. The seating on the server-side should be retained and this area improved. Focusing attention on the opposite side will create a space that serves Whitecross Street market customers over park and café users

Analysis of question 5: The budget for this project is limited and with the changing financial markets we may not be able to deliver all the improvements. If we could only develop a reduced version of the proposal, which three elements of the design would you choose? Please rank these in order of preference.

Respondents were asked to choose their top three elements from the following options:

- Proposed refurbished playground
- Proposed new path
- Proposed café garden
- Proposed location of existing stage
- Proposed location of growing garden

This question received 98 responses which we have been able to analyse. Of this number:

- A refurbished playground was identified at the number one priority
- The proposed location of the growing garden ranked second
- The proposed improvements to the café garden ranked third

The proposed new path and the proposed location of the existing stage ranked fourth and fifth place respectively.

As explained earlier, an additional 13 paper surveys responded to this question but didn't assign the first, second or third preference to their response. Of this number, 12 responses chose the proposed path as a preference, 10 chose the proposed café garden and nine chose a refurbished playground. Five people ticked proposed growing garden and two selected proposed location of existing stage.

Regrettably, it is difficult to assess how respondents view the creation of a new path from this data alone. As such, it is necessary to consider all the data collected so far, including the comments that people have submitted in relation to this element of the proposal.

Another anomaly was that the paper survey offered an additional option of 'other' for this question and 12 respondents submitted an 'other' response. Of this number, several respondents used the opportunity to stress the importance of more seating, more bins and better maintenance while others stated that the new path should be scrapped, and the size of the play area increased. A few people asked questions, such as when the building work would start and how long was it likely to take.

Analysis of question 6: Do you have any other comments?

This question received 35 responses.

- 7 positive responses
- 20 neutral responses
- 8 negative responses

Examples of positive responses

"Looks great, so good luck".

"This is an excellent facility, be nice to have a few more benches to sit on."

"Hopefully the plans go ahead."

Examples of neutral responses

"Could've had somewhere we could shelter from the rain."

"I would rather the money be spent on reducing the Council Tax! The park is fine as it is although I think the proposed cafe garden would be great."

"It should be a NON SMOKING park."

Examples of negative responses

"The park is perfect as it is and very well used especially with families - what else is needed? Meanwhile there are cuts in mental health services! No maintenance of the Council estate which needs new paving stones, new fire safety front doors and lights that work efficiently as presently the timer seems to have been set to stay on until 2.30 PM!"

The water rates and communal heating charges have increased and yet money is being wasted on a park that is ok as it is!”.

“Improve the basic infrastructure first - toilet, tap, proper litter bins and make sure park is kept clear of litter. Maintain what you have rather than spend money on things you can't maintain.”

“This looks very expensive and something that could be achieved in a much lower impact, organic way and which would be more charming. Islington have a habit of being obsessed with neatness and hard landscaping - let's have less of that, more planting, a less controlled and more organic finish.”

Headlines and themes from question 6

People who answered this question ultimately used it as an opportunity to highlight the points they had already made. These included:

- Widespread support for additional seating and bins
- Demands that general maintenance is stepped up otherwise any spend on improvements risk being futile
- Calls for a no-smoking policy to be implemented in the park
- Shelter to be provided near the café
- Requests for measures to stop children and cyclists off the paths
- Concern that the engagement had not been inclusive or wide-ranging enough and that the survey questions were inadequate

Summary

While feedback to the proposals has been broadly positive, it has also shown that people want any investment in the park to be sensible and appropriate with an emphasis on soft landscaping, improved play value and increased seating. They also want to see a better waste management regime and for maintenance to be improved. The key findings of this report are as follows:

- The plan to create a new path along the northern edge of the park should be scrapped and the secret woodland area retained
- The play area should be improved with all popular equipment retained or replaced like-for-like and the main fencing around the play area should be retained
- Plans to create a garden space next to the café and to relocate the community growing beds should proceed

- Internal fencing around the park should be reviewed and removed where it is found to be unnecessary

The park's waste management plan is currently under review and a further update on the best way forward will be announced in due course. The Parks Department acknowledges that merely providing more bins is not the answer to the litter problem and it is working with colleagues in Street Environment Services to identify what reasonable measures can be put in place.

Similarly, the maintenance plan for the park is also being reviewed. The Grounds Maintenance Service is currently implementing a new operational structure which will bring about improvements to quality of maintenance for Fortune Street Park and all Council Parks. In addition to this, a one-year maintenance regime for the new landscaping works will be included within the contract specification for this project.

Next steps

The design feedback is now being reviewed by the design team and will be incorporated where possible in an updated design. The updated design will be available to view on our website in spring 2023. If you subscribe to the project mailing list you will receive a notification when the design is available. You can subscribe to the project mailing list by emailing Lara.Ellington-Brown@islington.gov.uk.

An indicative timeline for this project is as follows:

- Spring 2023 – update on design
- Summer 2023 – appointment of a contractor
- Autumn 2023 – works start on -site
- Winter 2023 – works complete

Please note that these timings are approximate and are subject to change. Updates on the programme will be issued regularly via the project mailing list and will also be posted on the project's [webpage](#)

Appendices

Q&A from Zoom engagement event on 6 December 2022

Q: Where has money come from?

A: Funding for this scheme comes from CIL and S106. Funding from CIL goes into a pot and it is not development specific. The S106 funding comes from a development at 3 Finsbury Square; 14 Finsbury Square; 207 Old Street.

Q: Kids love the informal play area in that area (where new path would go). Is there a way of making that a secret woodland – that would be amazing for kids.'

A: It might be possible to reposition some of the fencing to enable this.

Q: What are the plans for the surface of the playground?

A: The [existing] mesh surface is designed to have grass growing through it so it feels like you're playing on grass, but once you have heavy footfall that doesn't happen.

We will establish plans for surface once priorities have been decided, but it's likely that we will have to use a fixed surface that is impact absorbing. There is the option to use a bouncy rubber surface (rubber crumb) but this glued together using an epoxy glue that is bad for the environment which we (Davies White) don't like to use. It's also made up of ground up tyres and at the end of its life it must be disposed of as contaminated waste.

Another option is plastic grass which impact layer underneath it – again, not great for environment. What's there currently is a quite a good solution but we need to consider if we use it everywhere or in parts, alongside something like mulch. It needs to be maintainable for the council.

We need to remember that all the trees need to be protected and there are play structures beneath the trees, so we need to be careful how we take them out and how they are replaced. This is likely to be a combination of repair and repainting of existing pieces alongside some new and accessible items.

Q: What is your approach regarding the grass lawn?

A: There is the opportunity to carry out some repairs and do some aeration but wear and tear on grass in public parks is very common and it is something that needs to be accepted. We (Davies White) wouldn't recommend artificial grass.'

Map showing engagement leaflet distribution area

