

Highbury Fields café building and wildlife garden: public engagement summary report

Background

Islington Council has allocated funds to improve the north-east corner of Highbury Fields (adjacent to Highbury Grove) by demolishing a number of poor-quality and abandoned buildings and replacing them with a new café building, including public toilets and a park keeper's office, and a new wildlife garden and shelter for children to learn about nature.

It is proposed that the new café building will replace the existing Oasis café which is in poor repair and in need of significant investment. A number of technical surveys have been undertaken to ascertain the condition of the café and the surrounding site and these have concluded that that repairs might not be successful in halting further deterioration and would not make it possible to meet today's need.

The same applies to the Bandstand building which has not been in use since December 2020. The decision to demolish this building and create a wildlife garden and teaching shelter in its place will allow stay and play to continue in Highbury Fields, offering a flexible and Covid-secure environment for children and families.

This project initially began in 2017 when Levitate Architects were appointed to design improvements for this scheme based on a brief that included a café, public toilets, park keeper facilities, stay and play provision and a community room. We consulted on these proposals in 2018 and residents were asked to choose between five options for replacing the existing buildings with one or two new buildings. 56 per cent of residents chose a single-building option on the west side of the café lawn but there was widespread concern about the size of the building and the impact that this would have on the openness of the landscape. This scheme also had a funding shortfall and so it was halted in 2019. The council has since allocated additional funds and the brief has been updated, reducing the size of the proposed building by removing the requirement for a community room and amending the stay and play provision to an outdoor facility. Levitate were re-appointed in 2021 to develop the proposals in line with this brief and public engagement began in February 2022.

Aims and objectives of the public engagement sessions

The public engagement period on these proposals ran from 7 February 2022 to 11 March 2022. The aim of the public engagement was to get feedback and comments on the design of the building and the wildlife garden and shelter. There was also an opportunity for residents to suggest the kinds of activities for children they would like to see included in the wildlife garden's future programme of activities.

The information received from this exercise will help to refine the design of the building to enable a planning application to be submitted in autumn 2022.

Public engagement approach and methodology

We engaged with the public via:

- two evening public Zoom sessions
- a leaflet/letter drop including a return envelope for responses
- a public exhibition at a local library
- our website
- a survey
- an email inbox (highburyfieldsimprovement@islington.gov.uk)

Online Zoom sessions

Two public Zoom events were held on Monday 28 February and Wednesday 2 March 2022 from 7-8.30pm to provide an opportunity for the local community to give their feedback about the proposals. The first session was attended by 29 people and the second by four. The sessions were hosted by Lara Ellington-Brown, Parks Department Project Manager, and the project architect Tim Sloan and co-facilitated by Head of Parks, Barry Emmerson, Early Childhood Area Lead, David Norman and the Assistant Parks Manager, Bhupesh Thapa.

The Zoom sessions began with a short introduction from the Project Manager before moving on to a 15-minute PowerPoint presentation by the architect, explaining the proposal in the context of Highbury Fields. The presentation included site and location plans, information on the latest tree surveys and several views of both the café building and wildlife garden. Once the presentation had finished, the final part of the meeting was a question-and-answer session using the hand raising icon to allow the hosts to call on people individually to speak.

The 'chat' function was also used to capture real-time feedback and comments during the online sessions. A note on how this feedback was used is included in this summary document.

Leaflet distribution

15,110 engagement leaflets were distributed to the local residents in the Highbury East and Highbury West wards between Monday 7 and Friday 11 February 2022. These leaflets

contained images of the design, a paper copy of the survey and a return envelope for people to send their completed surveys back.

Library exhibition

The design proposal was displayed at Islington's Central Library, a short walk away from Highbury Fields, from Monday 7 February until Friday 11 March. This provided an opportunity for residents to view the designs in person at a time that suited them. Paper copies of the survey were also available and visitors to the exhibition were encouraged to fill it out on site and hand their completed survey to library staff. These responses were stored securely and collected by the Project Manager when the exhibition closed.

Website

The proposed design, Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) about the project and a link to the online survey with a deadline of 11 March were published on the Highbury Fields project webpage in the parks service part of the council website. This webpage was also used to provide details of the Zoom sessions. The FAQs were updated to provide answers to questions that were raised in the online Zoom sessions and also in response to questions that have been raised via email and the engagement survey. These FAQs will continue to be updated as the project progresses.

Survey

A total of five questions were included in the survey. The deadline for receiving feedback via the online survey was set as midnight on 11 March 2022, allowing five 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, until 25 March.

The survey asked the following questions:

1. What are your thoughts on the proposed new café building on Highbury Fields?
2. What are your thoughts on the proposed wildlife garden and shelter?
3. What kinds of activities for children would you like to see included in the wildlife garden's future programme of activities?
4. Would you be interested in being part of a community gardening group to help with developing and maintaining the wildlife garden? If yes, please provide your contact details.
5. Please add any other comments about the proposed improvements here.

Due to a technical error, question 3 did not appear on the online survey but was included on the paper survey. Only participants who responded via post or the library were able to answer that question. However, in answering questions 2 or 5, some people did mention the kinds of activities they would like to see take place in the wildlife garden and those comments have been extracted and added to the comments collected in response to question 3.

For the purpose of this engagement report, only questions 1, 2, 3 and 5 have been analysed here.

Highbury Fields e-mail inbox

We created a project email address to provide another method for sending in comments. 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 meetings over Zoom
- a Survs online survey

There was also a meeting with the Highbury Fields Association, who as a key stakeholder made their comments regarding the proposal in person.

In total we received 404 responses comprised of:

- 282 online survey responses
- 101 postal survey responses
- 13 library survey responses
- 8 email responses via the Highbury Fields email inbox. These have been analysed as part of the overall feedback.

Zoom chat feedback

29 people attended the Zoom session on 28 February 2022. 11 posts were made using the chat function, 9 of which were questions. These were extracted and included within the FAQ that were published on the website. Most of these questions related to the layout of the building and whether consideration had been given to orientating it another way; the maintenance plan for keeping the toilets clean and questions about the wildlife garden and whether it will be accessible to the public.

4 people attended the second session and the chat function was not used except at the end, when attendees used it to thank the design team and the council for its work on the proposals.

Survey feedback

The responses to the questions 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 to the building 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 often 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, feedback specifically about the design of the building or suggestions for design changes were filtered out and listed below each question.

Analysis of question 1: What are your thoughts on the proposed new café building on Highbury Fields?

This question received 392 responses:

- 281 positive responses
- 74 neutral responses
- 37 negative responses
- 12 people did not respond to this question

Examples of positive responses

“This will be fantastic! Highbury Fields desperately needs this!”

“A good plan – please progress this asap.”

“Looks good – right size, right design, right location. Far better than previously proposed.”

“An excellent and much needed update to this very important local park. The 1 building project will minimise impact on surrounding outdoor space and create a social area for everyone to enjoy”.

"I think it's brilliant and will revitalise parts of the park that have been left to decay. I also greatly appreciate the new toilet facilities, especially in making them more accessible to people who need a bit more space to navigate toilets."

"The proposed location of the café and park office makes sense. It will maintain the views across the Fields, will not dominate the space and is easily accessible by park-users."

Examples of neutral responses

"Looks fine, but who will go in there and will the costs skyrocket?"

"No opinion."

"It's very difficult to assess how much space the café will have and therefore the facilities that it will be able to offer. A quality café is of course needed."

"Don't know."

"I generally support the proposed new café building but have strong reservations about the proposed toilets..."

"How will staff interact with the public?"

Examples of negative responses

"I oppose these proposals since you have failed to communicate them properly. I have zero confidence your new larger building won't consume excessive green space in my local park."

"The design is cheap and uninspired and the site is tucked away in a corner that only a minority of potential users even knew existed."

"I do not want the proposed new café building. I love Highbury Fields for its simplicity...I'd prefer to keep the park as green as possible. The addition of a café will involve building work, loss of green space plus litter and waste once it's open. There are plenty of cafes on the high street so it seems unnecessary to build one on our limited green spaces."

"We disapprove [of] the new scheme at Highbury Fields entirely... We as a family use Highbury Fields, the sports facilities, the cafe and the toilets regularly. There is a better use for public money, collected by the Council, than to spend on something that already exists and working."

"I believe it is unnecessary and a waste of resources that are currently needed ...once again the council are choosing publicity over people."

Headlines and themes from question 1

Many people were concerned that the proposal sought to build on the lawn commonly referred to as the 'toddler play lawn' opposite the Oasis café. This area is a fenced and gated public area and is heavily used by young families and toddlers and also provides access for tennis players. This is incorrect and there are no plans to build on this area. Many people also commented that they felt the engagement material wasn't clear in explaining where the new buildings would be sited and called for a site plan depicting the proposed – rather than just the current – site layout. This had not been included in the material. It is likely that the

misconception regarding the toddler play lawn was a result of an omitted site plan and this has been noted for future public engagement exercises.

Aside from this, the main headline and themes for this question were as follows:

- Important that the toddler play lawn stays the same. This was often expressed as a desire for the design of the new café to enable those with young children to use the café while still being able to watch over their children while they play. This was best summed up in the following comment from one respondent: “The existing café and fenced-off area, while not beautiful or the best café, is successful in one important respect: the area is easily overseen by parents and there are no dangers. This means parents can relax and gives children the freedom to explore.”
- Location of the proposed café makes sense
- Concerns about the position of the toilets being ‘too close’ to the tennis courts
- Concerns about the toilets being ‘too hidden’ and not visible enough
- Concerns about the toilets being gender-neutral
- Important that the toilets are well-maintained
- Important that the toilets are free to use
- Toilets should be accessible and open outside of the café’s operating hours
- Concerns that the proposal doesn’t include enough toilets
- Urinals should be considered in place of one of the gender-neutral toilets
- Comments about the existing café offer
- Concerns about the existing café operator and the importance of ensuring a fair tender process
- Important that a new café isn’t a chain
- Important that a new café has sustainable practices in place, such as zero-waste and plastic free
- Concerns that the new café won’t allow dogs
- Improvements are much needed and existing café long overdue a refurbishment
- Concerns that a new café will be expensive and exclusionary
- Questions as to whether a new café is necessary given there is a new café at Christ Church

- Important that a sound maintenance plan for the building is developed and that it is affordable in the long-term
- Concerns that any trees might be removed
- A concern that the proposed building might obscure views

Question 1 design-focussed feedback

- Of the respondents who mentioned the size of the building, the majority were in agreement with its size, followed by a smaller number who feel it is too big. A smaller number still feel the building could be made bigger.
- 'The location of the toilets could be off-putting and distracting for tennis players and the suggestion of putting up a windbreak only increases the feeling that the café has turned its back on tennis.'
- The path to access the toilets is too narrow and 'tucks them out of sight', leading to safety fears. 'The location of the toilets off a narrow corridor at the rear of the building is problematic. Waiting and passing through, opening doors etc and without any surveillance from the café. A more workable solution could be to give access from the west side along Church Path where more space is available for waiting and with some surveillance from the café and visible to passers-by.
- A Changing Places Toilet should be considered
- Does the path to the toilets allow enough space for wheelchairs, buggies and mobility scooters?
- Could the building be extended a little to the north to accommodate an extra toilet?
- Toilets and bins could face the other way
- Concerns that it will no longer be possible to sit on the café terrace and view court four
- Concerns that as the outside seating is on a path to the tennis courts, it will lack tranquillity
- Lighting will be important to ensure safety and discourage anti-social behaviour
- Adequate signposting to the toilets is very important, so people know where they are
- Tactile routes on the floor should be included to guide blind people through the space
- The toilets should be blind-friendly so that blind people can operate the toilet
- Storage facilities for tennis equipment needs to be dry as current storage is not
- The outside seating area should be bigger

- Concerns about tree removals. Some people were opposed to any trees being removed while others felt 'poor specimens' should be removed, particularly if it meant a larger seating area
- Important to ensure sufficient cycle parking
- The building should include solar panels
- Concerns about a chimney (flue) being featured and the impact on air quality
- Important that the design of the building reflects the local character [of the area]
- 'It would be nice if there was one more set of doors to connect the café to the outdoors'
- 'The kitchen and servery seem bigger than the indoor seating area which could be reconsidered'
- 'The design feels a little generic and it would be good to see something a bit different with a creative exterior design e.g. murals, tiles etc.'

Analysis of question 2: What are your thoughts on the proposed wildlife garden and shelter?

This question received 378 responses:

- 225 positive responses
- 63 neutral responses
- 90 negative responses
- 26 people did not respond to this question

Examples of positive responses

"Lovely. Just what we need in a borough famous – among other things – for a lack of green space."

"Lovely idea! It would be great to have a venue for parties too, like the ecology centre in Gillespie park."

"Excellent idea for promoting nature and wildlife. Must be used for educational purposes as well otherwise it will be a waste."

"A fantastic idea, especially the addition of a miniature wetland area, or wildlife pond, an undeniable foundation for any biodiversity initiative."

"Anything educational is welcome. I feel that it's very good for city children to learn about wildlife how to care for them (sic)."

Examples of neutral responses

“Ok, not an essential for me. Must be robust and easy to maintain or will become a burden. My focus would be on providing robust, easy to access play and relaxation spaces rather than getting too caught up in ecology niceties.”

“It’s hard to identify the location of the asset. It seems like an interesting proposal.”

“Looks pretty but I am concerned about the upkeep and how much it will cost.”

“I think the most important thing is having a safe space for parents to meet with their small children. Enclosed and no dangers. It allows kids to be able to roam without parents hovering and gives small children a well needed space to be free.”

“I think if the wildlife garden is easily accessible to children to enjoy then I’m all for it. If it’s a booking only or occasional use garden then I would be less in favour.”

Examples of negative responses

“It is difficult to understand where the garden will be and what it will replace. And what is the need for it? H. Fields is a rare open grassy space in Islington and much used. There is already Gillespie Park for nature study, please leave H. Fields open.”

“Anything but a pond please! We do not have many safe places to let little toddlers run around, oasis is the only play area we can do this. A pond would not be safe.”

“I do not like the new idea and oppose the new proposal. Please keep what we have as it is very much used and needed.”

“This is not a good replacement for the ‘1 ‘o’clock building’. Whilst the drop-in has ceased the council can provide indoor space which will allow parent and children to meet and play in comfort. An outdoor “shelter” is not good enough. The facility must be open to all families, not only those in most need of support.”

“We have a severe lack of facilities that are a safe space for parents and toddlers to go to. You neglected the building for years [and I] haven’t met anyone who think this area is an improvement. You have missed an opportunity to do more with this area.”

“It is to be questioned whether children and ‘wildlife’ areas are compatible. A more formal planting scheme including vegetable gardens would be more appropriate to an educational facility. The ‘shelter’ proposed is unworkable for say 30 children with inadequate seating and space for the WC.”

Headlines and themes from question 2

Many people expressed concern that the wildlife garden wouldn’t be accessible to the public with over 10% of respondents explicitly criticising the plan to restrict access. Some respondents said that they liked the idea but explained that they wouldn’t be able to support it if wasn’t accessible for all to use, while others felt it should be open to the public at weekends. There was also some confusion as to where the wildlife garden would be situated, with some people thinking this aspect of the proposal was going to replace the toddler play lawn. The other main headlines and themes from this question were:

- Concerns about plans to include a pond – many felt this would be unsafe and pose a risk to children
- Whether there was demand for a wildlife garden on Highbury Fields, especially when Gillespie Park is nearby
- Concerns that the wildlife garden was being created at the expense of the One O’Clock Club
- Concerns that the shelter wouldn’t protect children and users from adverse weather
- Area must be dog-free
- Concerns about the upkeep and how much that will cost
- Concerns that a wet environment will lead to an increase in rodents
- The importance of ensuring that it is looked after
- Adequate toilet and handwashing facilities need to be provided

Question 2 design-focussed feedback

Few comments relating to the design of the wildlife garden were received with the majority of respondents asking questions about the use of the space and where exactly it would be located. Many respondents were concerned that the garden and teaching shelter would encourage anti-social behaviour and were keen to understand how this might be mitigated. Of the design-focussed feedback, the following comments were made:

- “The space looks tucked away
- The design doesn’t reflect current ideas and trends in landscape design
- The wildlife garden should include play equipment, with particular emphasis on natural play
- The wildlife shelter should be focused on sustainability, emphasised in the materials used to build the space
- The shelter should be made from timber
- If a pond is included, it should be of a decent size and could be fenced off or have gently sloping sides
- The wildlife garden could be made bigger if the play lawn was reduced
- The proposals seem more suited to primary children aged over 5 years
- The design needs to be revised to provide sufficient space for the proposed toilet
- Has consideration been given to having the door opening into the heart of the shelter?

Analysis of question 3: What kind of activities for children would you like to see included in the wildlife garden's future programme of activities?

This question received 74 responses out of a possible 114 from the surveys returned by post and available at the library. It was omitted from the online version in error. However, the responses below also include those captured from answers given to other questions across the online survey, most notably question 2. Many respondents mentioned the types of activities they would like to see take place in the wildlife garden when giving their thoughts on the wildlife garden.

Of the returned paper surveys, 74 people answered this question while 40 left this question blank. There were no negative comments. The below responses have been grouped in order of popularity, from those receiving multiple mentions to those receiving just one.

Most popular responses

- Flower growing/growing workshops (4 mentions)
- Food growing (3 mentions)
- Nature lessons and clubs (3 mentions)
- Sustainability workshops (3 mentions)
- Half-term sessions (2 mentions)
- Litter picking (2 mentions)
- Teaching about the dangers of litter and rubbish (2 mentions)
- Wreath making (2 mentions)
- Provision for older people (2 mentions)
- More for teens (2 mentions)

Single mentions

- Sessions for multiple ages
- Saturday sessions
- Gardening workshops
- Mother and baby groups
- Stargazing
- Bat watching
- Waste reduction lessons

- Composting
- How to respect nature workshops
- How to spot different animals in the area
- Bird watching
- Bug watching
- Educating kids who don't have their own garden
- How to feed birds
- Making bird feeders and bird boxes
- Table tennis
- Teaching about the seasons
- Teaching about habitats
- History of Highbury Fields
- Arts and craft
- Seed x-rays
- 'From Field to Fashion' – learning where clothes come from
- Forest school
- Storytelling
- Music lessons
- Scouts
- Tadpole to frog lifecycle
- Survival skills
- Bug collecting
- Easter treasure hunts
- Children's playgroup
- Pond dipping
- Den building

- Mindfulness

Of the responses received, nine referred to the type of features they would like to see as part of the wildlife garden. Although this wasn't part of this question, these responses have been extracted and listed below as design-focussed feedback for the purpose of this engagement exercise.

Question 3 design-focussed feedback – features to include

- General/informal play
- kids' planting scheme
- Nature trails
- Sensory garden
- Mud kitchen
- Petting zoo
- Sandpits
- Hedgehog dens
- Bee hives
- Long grass that children can make their own paths through
- A miniature train

Analysis of question 5: Please add any other comments about the proposed improvements here.

This question received 308 responses.

- 131 positive responses
- 121 neutral responses
- 56 negative responses
- 96 people did not respond to this question

Examples of positive responses

“Good to see finally now please with good speed deliver! Perfection and 100% agreement does not exist. The best is the enemy of the good! Go for it. Please tender the cafe to get a new operator.”

“I really hope this goes ahead as it will complement the new community space that the church are building and will make the top section of the park have a real focus and community around it.”

“This is such a lovely idea I hope it goes ahead!”

“Intelligent layout. Should improve functional engagement of the park across all generations.”

“Excellent ideas – lavatories much needed!”

Examples of neutral responses

“Please keep are oasis play area the same.”

“A cafe is a nice idea. Changing the current free play space will be detrimental to families in the area. It will not be an improvement from our perspective.”

“I think it’s important to remember that there is extreme poverty in the area and any plans must reflect that, including making any “paid for” services to be affordable to all.”

“The core business objective should be around bringing the local community together in clean, and safe surroundings with access for all. We should open access to the wildlife garden at least a 2 out of the 7 days a week or at off-peak time slots.”

“I am not clear what is happening to the derelict bungalow on Highbury Fields. It is an eyesore, a waste of space and a home for foxes. It would be great if that was being demolished.”

“My only concern is about the construction period (start date, how long it will take, noise, entry points to the park, etc.).”

“My main concern is the time taken make the changes to the cafe. Six months – or more – is a long time to do without facilities here. Presumably the current toilets will remain for the duration. It would also be desirable to have some temporary provision for drinks and snacks at least. Could some consideration be given to that?”

Examples of negative responses

“This plan should be totally scrapped and the existing buildings dotted around Highbury Fields refurbished and turned into a decent cafe (the one already existent near the tennis courts) the children bandstand area, the various mini derelict shelters near the tennis courts. The strip of tarmac that used to be a road needs to be dug out and two halves of the fields joined up with more plants and trees. This proposal should be binned altogether.”

“Hotch potch of plans, as usual.”

“I disapprove the scheme entirely. It would be helpful for the Council to reduce council tax. The amount of money that the Council allocated to the scheme needs to apply to fund the council. And by that amount, the council tax needs to be reduced.”

“I don't think these are 'improvements'. Less is more. It's not clear why exactly we need another coffee shop and more buildings. The main reason the Fields are so popular (and beautiful) is that they are just that - fields. We don't need more buildings or artificial structures to detract from what is a lovely, serene green space.”

“The focus should be including a key provision that you have neglected. The facility for the under-fives to have an indoor space for creativity, socialising and support from play leaders, especially given the marked inequalities in the area. There is a lack of such amenities and I consider it a great loss to the community especially for those who live in cramped conditions with limited access to playgroups and learning equipment. The One O’Clock Club was extremely popular and well used. Combining with an enhanced outdoor area would have helped mitigate some of the deprivations suffered in the area. I feel the cafe largely serves the better off of Islington”

Headlines and themes from question 5

As illustrated above, the majority of responses were those thanking the council for its work on the project, expressing a desire for the project to progress quickly and those which emphasised that the improvements were long overdue.

Otherwise, the majority of neutral responses were dictated by a large number of appeals to not reduce the toddler play lawn with many respondents taking the opportunity to reiterate their opposition to this idea. Similarly, many people also lodged objections to the proposed pond, asking for this idea to be reconsidered and removed from the plans on safety grounds. Residents also objected to the idea that the wildlife garden would not be open to the public at all times and to the possibility that trees might need to be removed in order for the scheme to go ahead. Of those who mentioned trees, responses were mixed. Some opposed any removals, while others called for removals to be kept to a minimum.

Many of the responses in this category were questions, often about plans for the park-keeper’s bungalow, possible re-provision of the Bandstand and general queries about the project programme. Some respondents also took the opportunity to request other improvements to the fields while others criticised council policies, such as Low Traffic Neighbourhood (LTN) schemes. The following demonstrates the main headlines and themes from this question.

- Criticism that the engagement material was unclear and the survey ‘not thought-through’
- Criticism and concern about the wildlife garden not being open to the public
- Comments on the future café offer with many people opposing a café chain
- Concerns about the current café provider and their future
- Hopes that the new café will offer a healthy food selection
- Criticism that the Bandstand isn’t being re-provided

- The importance of ensuring that the new toilets will be safe to use
- Concerns about the maintenance plan for the toilets and how the council intends to ensure they are clean to use
- Criticism over plans for the toilets to be gender-neutral with many respondents identifying as female stating that they wouldn't feel safe using them
- A desire for CCTV to be installed near the toilets
- Concerns about the loss of any trees as a result of the scheme
- Concerns that there isn't enough dog-friendly space

Question 5 design-focussed feedback

- More toilets are needed than what has been allowed for
- Prudent to ensure toilets are visible from Church Path
- A Changing Places toilet should be included
- It would be beneficial if a buggy could fit inside the toilets and baby change
- Lots of cycle parking should be included
- Inclusion of a water fountain (for drinking water) would be supported
- Requests for more daffodil planting and less frequent lawn mowing
- The café should provide good wifi and also outdoor charging points so that people can work outside
- A glassed view where the toilets and bins have been placed should be considered
- Consider turning the bins and toilets the other way
- "It would be interesting to see plans for the 'orchard' and the space previously occupied by the park-keeper's cottage. Without too much extra investment, a 'tangle' of paths might be fun for children and dog-walkers alike. Keep this area as integrated and accessible as possible."
- Improve the path to the southern-most tennis courts or unlock the gate to allow access to them from the other side
- 'The wildlife garden should be something more open and simple. Perhaps a tent-like structure which is easier/cheaper to replace, with a small storage/toilet block.'
- More seating needs to be included in the plans
- Include an area for local people to perform live music

- Incorporate local art to showcase local talent
- Consider using the teaching shelter as a performance pavilion in the evenings
- More bins needed by the tennis courts

Summary

The feedback to the proposals was ultimately positive, with 72% of respondents submitting positive comments in relation to the café building and 59% responding positively to the concept of a wildlife garden. Many respondents are keen to see an improved café on Highbury Fields but some of this support is caveated on the conditions that:

- no changes are made to the toddler play lawn (changes to the lawn are not, in fact, part of the proposals)
- the location of the toilets is reconsidered
- the inclusion of gender-neutral toilet facilities is reconsidered
- a café chain will not be invited to tender for the new café opportunity
- accessibility and safety concerns around the toilets are addressed. Many respondents are concerned that the pathway leading to them is too narrow to allow easy access for all users, particularly those with prams and wheelchairs and too hidden from view, leading to safety concerns, especially after dark.

Similarly, while 59% of those surveyed responded positively to plans for the wildlife garden, many of them are concerned about the idea that this space will not be open to the public and questioned whether the teaching shelter will provide as much value for young children as the Bandstand building did. There is also concern about the inclusion of a pond though it should be noted that this could be because people are under the impression it would be located on the toddler play lawn, unfenced. A proposed site plan will be made available to clarify this element.

Those who opposed plans for the wildlife garden generally did so on grounds that they feel they are ill-advised and unnecessary and that the funding could be put to better use elsewhere.

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 summer 2022. You can subscribe to the project mailing list by [emailing highburyfieldsimprovement@islington.gov.uk](mailto:highburyfieldsimprovement@islington.gov.uk) or by emailing Lara.Ellington-Brown@islington.gov.uk if you would like to receive a notification when this happens.

An indicative timeline for this project is as follows:

- May 2022: Engagement feedback published and design development

- June – August 2022: Planning permission preparation followed by public update on the design
- September 2022: Planning application to be submitted
- December 2022: Planning decision
- TBC: Mobilise to site and construction of phase 1

As part of the statutory process for planning applications there will be a consultation period where views of residents and local park users can be submitted to the local planning authority. Residents will be updated via the project mailing list and an update will also be published to our [website](#) when the planning application has been submitted so views and comments can officially be registered in regard to the planning application.