



Visitor Survey ~ Results

CONTENTS

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	2
Introduction	3
Q.1 How often do you visit the Park ?	3
Q.2, 3, 4 Hill Fort and Drover's Road	4
Q.5 What do you particularly like about the Park ?	5
Q.6 How could we improve your visitor experience ?	5
Q.7 How do you suggest we can protect and improve the wildlife and nature within the Park?	8
Q.8 Website or Facebook ?	10
Q.9 Volunteer Contact Details	10
Q.10 Other Comments.....	11
Conclusions	12

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Our survey was activated at the end of November 2021 and we now have 72 valid responses which we have analysed and summarised. We will forward this analysis and summary to the relevant councillors in West Northants Council (WNC) and West Hunsbury Parish Council (WHPC) and then ask to meet with them to pursue action. Some of the actions will be dependent upon the Friends gaining a 2nd Lottery Grant.

In the responses to [Q.1](#), we have found out that most visitors use the Park more than once a week and, from [Q.5](#), it is clear that the Park is most popular as a dog walking space, enhanced by the free parking and the Drover's Return café.

It is apparent from the responses to [Q.2, 3 and 4](#) that the great majority of visitors are aware of the Iron age Hill Fort, and would like to know more about its history, whilst fewer people know about the ancient Drover's Road through the Park. We will endeavour to update the History section on our website to provide more info on these.

Park users' ideas on how to improve the visitor experience ([Q.6](#)) concentrated primarily on reducing the mud and improving access, both generally and for wheelchairs and baby buggies. We will discuss these ideas with councillors and idverde.

Requests for more information were another priority identified ~ by notice boards, signposts, posters, guided walks and other events, as well as through our website and social media. Some of these we can resolve but others need funding and WNC permission.

Similarly, the requests for more benches, picnic tables, toilets and the like will have to be discussed with councillors.

In [Q.7](#), we asked for suggestions on how to protect and improve the wildlife and nature in the Park. Most people wanted to see more wildlife habitats, such as bird/owl boxes, bat boxes and bug hotels. More wild flowers and wild (flower) areas were the next most popular suggestions. We will liaise with the Wildlife Trust, idverde and Hunsbury Park Primary School to realise these requests as much as we can.

[Q.8](#) and [Q.9](#) were for our benefit, to find out if people prefer to check on the Parks and events from our website or our Facebook page (there was a preference for the website) and also to ask for contact details of anyone interested in joining us as a volunteer (or member). Five of you gave us contact details, which we have followed up.

The final question ([Q.10](#)) was simply to provide an opportunity for comments which had not been covered elsewhere in the survey. We have been able to categorise the responses to this question into Likes and Dislikes. It is gratifying to know that the Likes surpassed the Dislikes by a large margin. We have endeavoured to respond to the few Dislikes within the body of the following analysis.

More details of the analysis follow. Please contact us using FriendsOWHP@gmail.com if you would like to see the Excel spreadsheet summarising and categorising the responses for even more detail.

Introduction

Thanks to all of you who filled in a form, either online or on paper, to give us your views on what you think of the Country Park and how you think it could be improved ~ and thank you to Colin Ingle for letting us put our forms and collecting box in the Drovers Return café.

We have had 72 valid responses, which we have now analysed and summarised. There are a lot of responses and requests within the 72 which are outside our remit, unfortunately, and so we have no control over them, but we will be passing these on to the relevant authorities to advise them and request that something is done and we will report back with any actions that come of that.

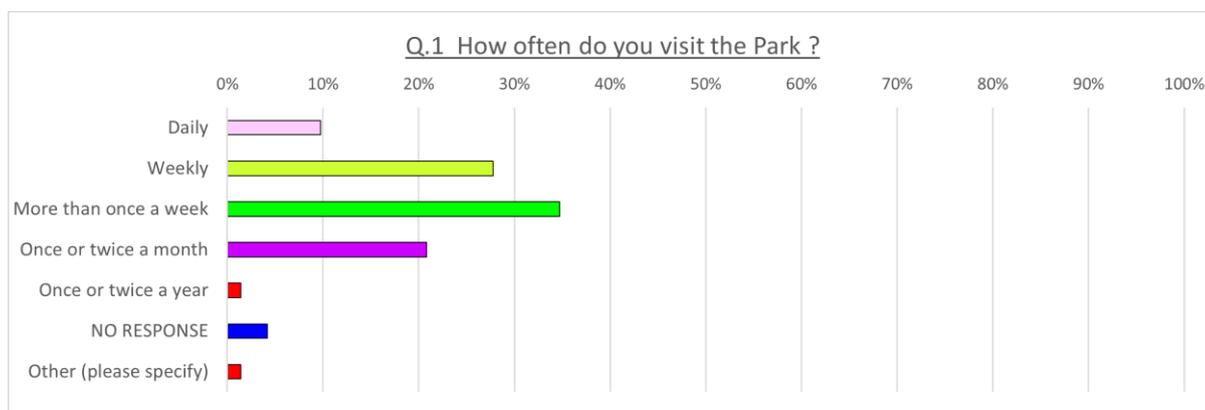
There are other responses and requests which need the Friends to be successful in obtaining a 2nd Lottery Grant to be able to progress them. We will, of course, include as many of these as we can in our bid for a 2nd grant.

For example, 33% of respondents want the mud reduced and the access improved. This is not something the Friends can do themselves, but we will put your requests to West Northants Council who own the Park.

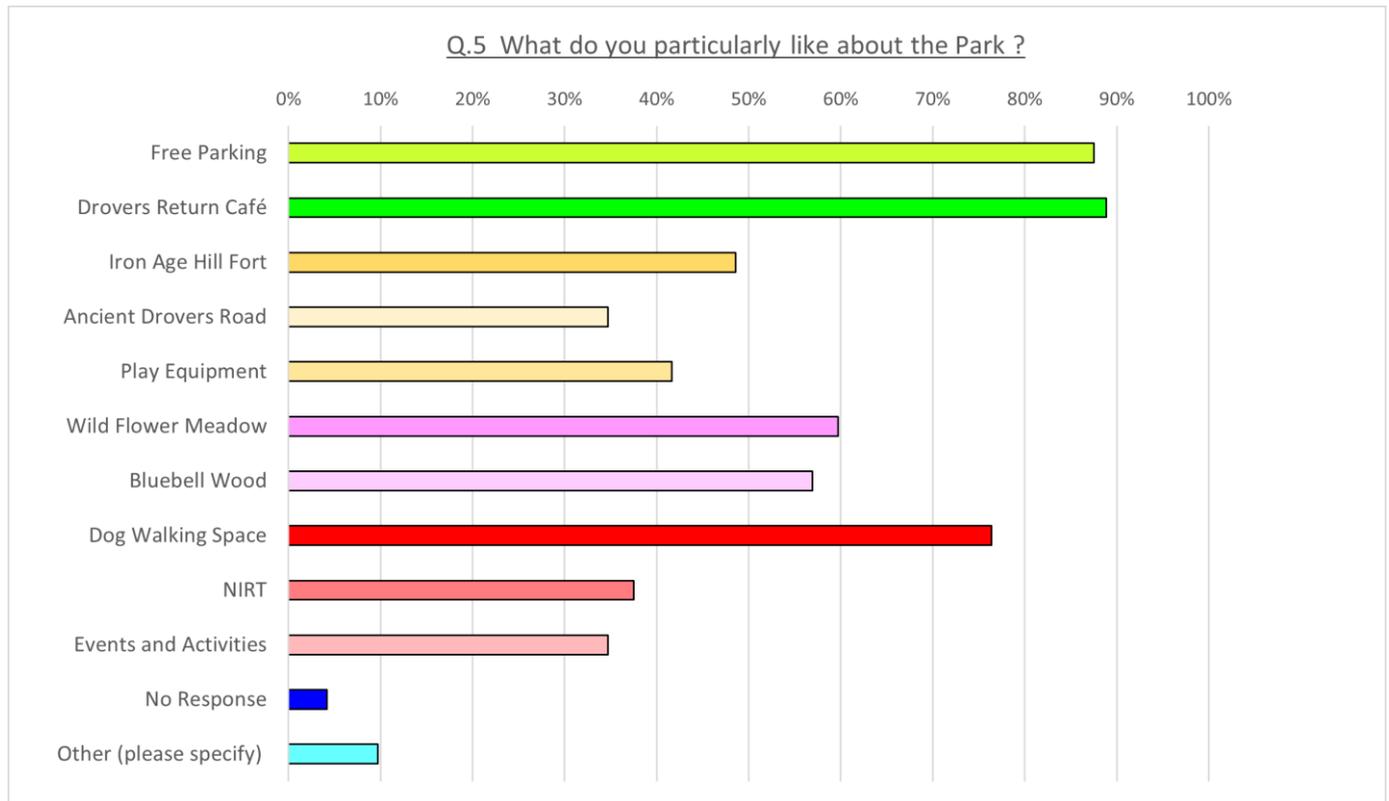
Our request to WNC will incorporate improving the drainage and surfacing of the Drovers' Road through the Park (and the Green Lane section of the Drovers' Road continuing to Ladybridge Drive) and also the provision of (or improvement to) disabled and baby-buggy access . We agree that it is important to do this, whilst ensuring that it is sympathetic to the environment, and will point this out to WNC.

Q.1 How often do you visit the Park ?

To start at the beginning, it is apparent that most Park users visit more than once a week (35%) with others (28%) coming weekly or once or twice a month (21%). Surprisingly (given that 76% of visitors like the Park as a dog walking space), only 10% of respondents visit daily.



Q.5 What do you particularly like about the Park ?



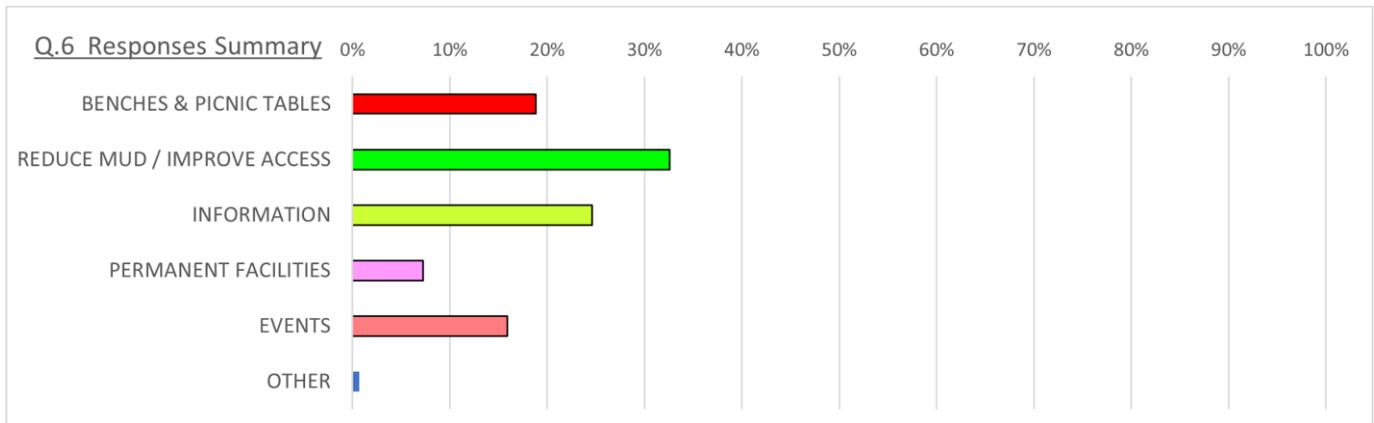
It is nice to know that the Drovers Return café is considered the most popular thing in the Park (89%), with the Free Parking being another major attraction (87%), as well as the dog walking space (76%).

It is apparent that the Park spaces are the main reason for visiting. As well as the Wild Flower Meadow (60%), Bluebell Wood (57%) and Hill Fort (49%), the lack of paved areas and paths, the changes of landscape with quiet areas and wild, open, spaces with room to wander at leisure without worrying about social distancing, and the ability to allow dogs to run free are all attractive to visitors.

A word of warning about the last, though : the fence separating the Park from the Danes Camp Way dual carriageway (the A5076) is in very poor condition and needs to be repaired or, ideally, upgraded, for most of the 2km length. So if you are allowing your dog(s) to run free, make sure you do not let them too near that fence until such time as we can persuade WNC to make it good.

Q.6 How could we improve your visitor experience ?

The main reason for the Survey was to inform us of what people know about the Park and what they would like to see done to improve it. Thus, Q.6 (*How could we improve your visitor experience?*) was fundamental to this. As the question allowed free-flow narrative responses, we have summarised and grouped them into categories.



As pointed out previously, the one aspect of the Park that concerned most visitors was the mud and the poor access for disabled people and mothers and families with prams or buggies. We will liaise with idverde and WNC (and NIRT), to see what can be done in the short term to improve all these aspects, ahead of possibly getting more funding through a 2nd Lottery Grant to help.

For those of you who seek more and better paths and improved disabled/buggy access, please do bear in mind that this is a Country Park and not a formal 'town centre' park. It is intended to be part of the country rather than part of the town, and as such, it would not be right to provide metalled paths throughout the Park.

We fully agree that the main path (the Drovers' Road and Green Lane) does need improving but that improvement must be sympathetic to its history and the environment. We also agree that ways to improve disabled/buggy access need to be considered.

The thing we, as the Friends, can try and improve without too much external funding, is the information aspect that so many people commented on in the survey (25%). However, whilst we have already initiated a request for some notice boards, we would welcome donations from those of you who asked for more boards so as to speed things up (or, alternatively, you could donate the notice boards themselves; we will install them).

More notice boards will allow us to put up maps of the Park and inform visitors about Park activities, as well as more historical information about the Iron Age Hill Fort and the Drovers' Road. Signposts will take longer, as these will need more funding. We have now set up a new Facebook page and we are working with NIRT to see how we can improve our liaison between us and promote each other's websites and events.

There were a lot of requests for more benches and picnic tables around the Park (19%). We will be seeking funding for more benches. Whilst this ostensibly should be a simple request for West Hunsbury Parish Council or WNC to effect (funding permitting) as there were nine picnic areas (tables, benches and litter bins) dotted around the Park when it was originally opened as a Country Park by Northampton Development Corporation in 1981, WHPC / WNC will now have to consider if this would mean increased costs for idverde to take on board additional maintenance and litter clearance.

There were a number of requests for more events in the Park (16%), including musical events, fun activities (particularly in half-terms and holidays), conservation and nature protection educational events and historical information talks, guided walks. We have always endeavoured to do these (and more) and will continue to try and provide a varied programme of events and activities to please a broad spectrum of visitors.

The requests for more information on NIRT events, and the history of the light railway and the 19th/20th century mining, are better answered by visiting the NIRT museum within their compound and by visiting their website <https://www.nir.org.uk/>. There was one suggestion that NIRT needs to totally open the railway track. They are working on it! They have acquired the necessary concrete sleepers and are in the process of replacing the rotting wooden ones. More info. on their website.

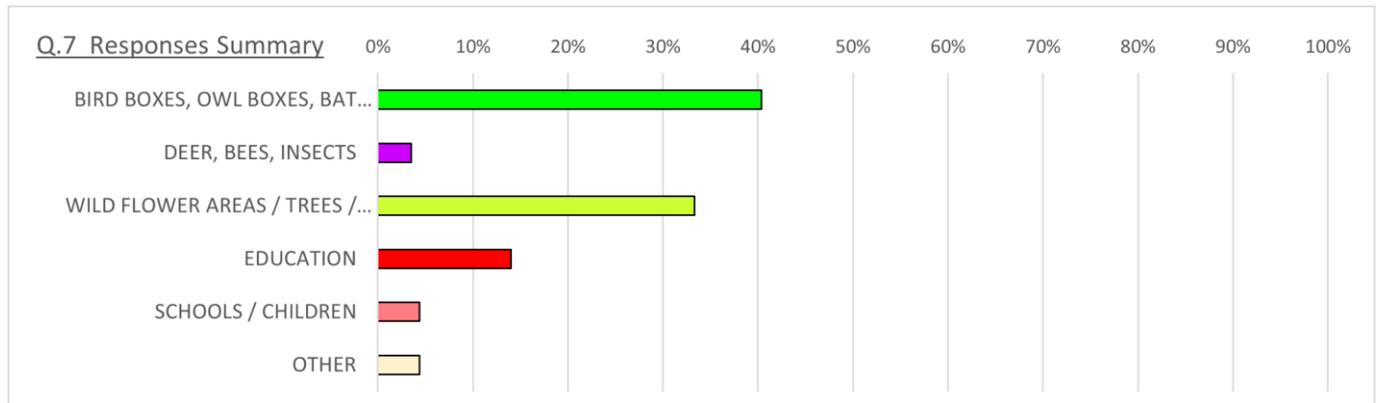
There were a small number of suggestions for Permanent Facilities (7%), with requests for some toilets and an expansion of the Drovers Return café, including more covered space for dog walkers. Any expansion of the café would be up to WNC as they are the landlords for the building.

Some people would like to see a permanent manned Visitor / Information Centre with information about the history of the Hill Fort as well as the flora and fauna. This last suggestion is already implemented in a way, as there is a permanent Information Corner kindly provided by Colin Ingle to the left of the covered entrance to the café, and the café is always manned (when open), but we agree that we need to review and expand the information in the Corner.

With regard to toilets, the Drovers Return building was originally built (c.1985) as a toilet block. Over the years it was vandalised and became derelict before Colin Ingle decided to turn it into a café. We are so pleased that he did, as it has made the Park (and car-park) a lot more secure and friendly, reduced vandalism (remember the burnt out cars?) and has become the central hub for the Park community. We don't think that anyone could guarantee that a similar toilet block (presumably set remotely within the Park) would not undergo a similar fate. However, we will suggest to WNC that a toilet block in the vicinity of the café might be acceptable.

As to the Other comment (1%), this asked for the Park gates to be kept open later in winter months. Since we had the Country Park gate installed in October 2018, we have noticed a marked decrease in litter and vandalism and, from October to March it is usually dark by 5pm, when the gate is closed, with only a few people using the Park after this ~ mostly dog walkers. It is a moot point as to whether there should be a gradual latening of the gate closing as the days get longer through March (and vice versa as they get shorter through September), but for those volunteers who disturb their evenings 7 days week to go and shut the gate it is easier to have a set time to remember.

Q.7 How do you suggest we can protect and improve the wildlife and nature within the Park?



Most suggestions (44%) were for wildlife habitats, such as bird boxes, owl boxes and bat boxes, as well as one for a bird hide and a couple for bug hotels / insect habitats. We are all in favour of these ideas and will work on actioning them in conjunction with Hunsbury Park Primary School and idverde (which would also help expedite some of the requests that there is more interaction between the School and the Friends).

There was also one suggestion that deer be introduced into the Park and a query if there was anywhere a local bee-keeper could put a hive. We love the idea of having some bee-hives but that does clash with encouraging families and young children into the Park. We are aware that ACRE are hoping to incorporate some bee hives into their renovation and development of Hunsbury Hill Farm so we suggest anyone who has bee-hives contact ACRE direct <https://www.northantsacre.org.uk/hunsbury-hill-farm-development>.

There are already Muntjac deer in (or around) the Park, although they keep themselves well-hidden in view of the amount of dog walking around the Park. That said, we do not want to introduce any more deer, as they are notorious browsers, eating the shoots from shrubs and trees, as well as woodland herbs and brambles. As we have been promoting wild flowers, including bluebells and snowdrops, and young trees/whips, introducing more deer would increase the likelihood of our efforts, and those of Rotary, idverde and the Hunsbury Park Primary School Super Heroes, being destroyed.

Most of the other responses to Q.7 (33%) recommended more wild flowers / wild flower areas, aconites in the snowdrop area, long grass borders, planting of native hedges and the like, as well as management of trees and shrubbery. We have also grouped into this category the idea that various parts of the Park should be sectioned off in annual rotation to protect it from dogs and people. Whilst being an attractive idea from an ecological viewpoint, the practicalities of achieving this last idea make it doubtful that it will come to fruition. However, we will certainly see what we can do about increasing the wild flowers/areas, long grass borders, etc, subject to funding.

There was one suggestion that we have included in this category for "More planted flowers". We take this to mean formal flower beds rather than wild flowers, bluebells and snowdrops, etc. like those that we already have. We already have a couple of small planted flower beds (one at the entrance to the Park and one at the exit from the car-park as you go towards the railway level crossing)¹ and do not really have the man-power to increase this dramatically, nor is it appropriate to have more of these in a Country Park.

18% of the responses to Q.7 asked for more education of visitors, to reduce environmental damage (including fires, barbecues, digging in the fort environs, all of which are illegal) and increase respect for the wildlife and nature, as well as more activities such as bird watching, bat walks, butterfly and moth counts. Also included in this percentage are the suggestions that there should be more liaison with the local school to help build and install wildlife habitats and boxes. Other suggestions to "Open (the Park) to local primary schools" and to have a "Forest school area for organised events for schools" are already happening. Hunsbury Park Primary School holds classes in the Park most weeks and other schools (not just primary) visit the Park regularly.

Other responses include our favourite "Nothing needs doing, it's perfect as it is". Thank you to the respondent (AJ) who wrote that.

One request was to have litter picker grabs available so that visitors can litter pick ad hoc. Colin Ingle keeps a couple in the Drivers Return for us, so please simply ask him for one (and make sure you return it, please). You should bring your own bag and gloves.

Another request was for more dog-poo bins. WNC will not add any more bins, but remember that dog-poo bags can be put in both the standard litter bins as well as the red dog poo bins.

The request to fill in holes in the playing field is probably something that cannot be achieved practically. They are dug by rabbits as "escape rooms" for when they are far from their burrows, so for every one that is filled, there is likely to be another one dug nearby soon after.

Similarly, we would love to put a complete stop to motorcycles/motocross bikes (and the new craze of electric scooters) messing around in the park. These are all illegal and there are a number of signs around the Park(s) to tell visitors this.

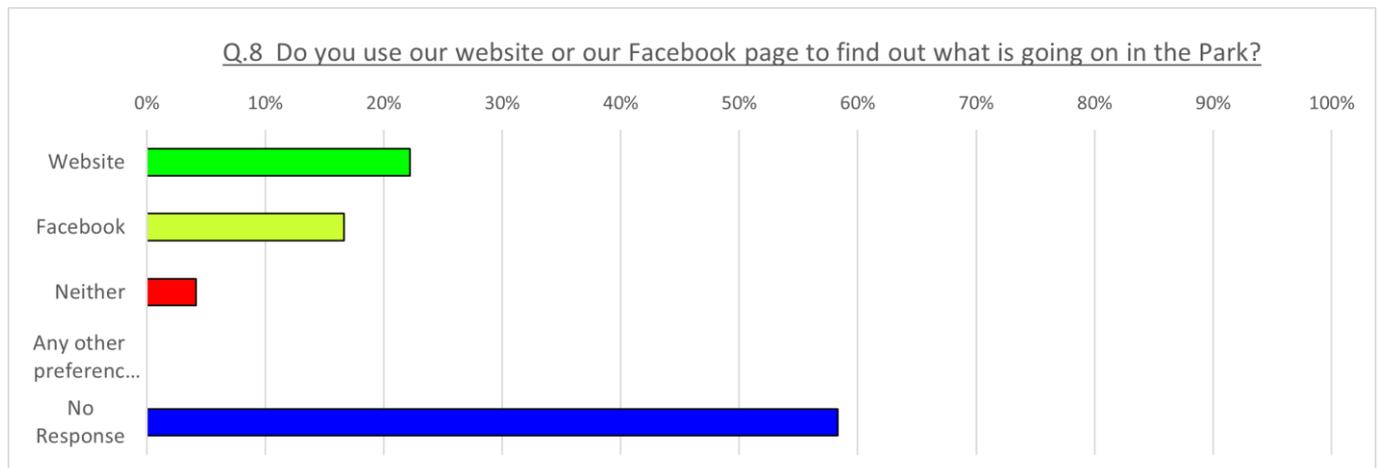
¹ There is also another small flower bed maintained by the Friends of West Hunsbury Parks in the so-called 'picnic area' in Wootton Brook Park, adjacent to Shelfleys Lake weir.



The problem is how to police it. The Friends simply do not have the man-power to do anything and WNC only have one Park Ranger patrolling Hunsbury Hill Country Park (and other parks). All we can suggest is that any Park visitor seeing any illegal activity in the Park (including motorbikes, barbecues, fires, digging, metal detecting, ignoring their own dog's poo, etc) take a photo and phone the police to report it.

Q.8 Website or Facebook ?

We asked if people preferred to use our website or our Facebook page to find out what is going on in the Park. Only 42% of respondents answered this question, but of those that did there was a clear preference for the website (22% over 17%).



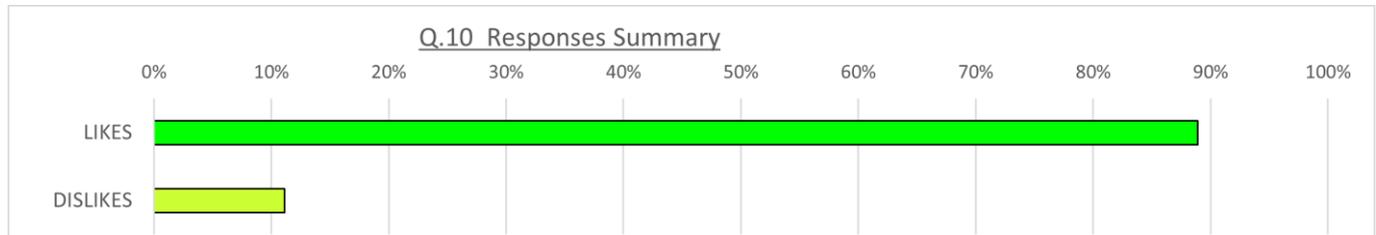
The fact that our Facebook has not been working for the last 6 months might have influenced these responses. For those of you who do prefer to use Facebook, be assured that we are in the process of setting up a new Facebook page and we will let you have the details as soon as it is up and working.

Q.9 Volunteer Contact Details

Q.9 was simply an opportunity for respondents to provide us with contact details if you wanted to volunteer to help us. Five of you did and we have tried to contact all of you to follow up.

Q.10 Other Comments

We have categorised the responses to Q.10 (*If you have any other comments you wish to make, please do so here*) simply into Likes & Dislikes. Although only 26% of respondents got this far in the survey, it is comforting to see that 89% of the comments made could be categorised as "Likes". Thank you to all of you who gave us a 'Thank you' for the work that we do.



As for the "Dislikes" :

- Car Park gets too full, especially at weekends :
We have asked idverde to move the piles of wood chippings that were dumped in the corner of the car-park late last year. This will help alleviate the problem. We do not want to increase the car park size to the detriment of the Park areas.
- Too much broken play equipment not being replaced :
We report broken play equipment to WNC. They have recently renewed the 'spinning saucer' and, in early March, they have renewed the 'sprung motorbike' with a 'sprung baby elephant'.



WNC advise that the 'umbrella' will not be replaced and so will remain simply as a pole. (They also recently repaired the 'ski exerciser' in Ladybridge Park play area.)

Conclusions

We will report the results of our survey to WNC and point out to them those suggestions, requests and concerns that should be considered a priority. We will, of course, liaise with the council to press for action on these.

We ask you to remember that the Friends of West Hunsbury Parks are less than a dozen proactive individuals and the only funding we currently have is from donations (including a portion of each Northampton Lottery ticket purchased in our name) and the occasional small grants.

To fund, organise and steward more events, more activities and more facilities, including information and education, we need more volunteers and more funding. To all of you who praised our efforts to make and keep the Park as beautiful as it is, please, please, please buy some [Northampton Lottery tickets](#) and then let us know how you can help us as a volunteer. Contact us using FriendsOWHP@gmail.com.
