



Glynneath Welfare Park Feasibility Study

March 2021

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1. Introduction

Urban Foundry ('we') was commissioned by Glynneath Town Council ('the Town Council') to explore the potential for developing Welfare Park, considering how it could be improved in order to maximise its potential for the community's benefit.

This report summarises the findings of our study, which focused on consultative work with park users, residents and other local stakeholders in Glynneath, coupled with site visits to the park and a desk-based review of relevant information.

Background and context

The Welfare Park is a well-used local park, centrally located in the centre of Glynneath. However, it has become tired and in need of updating.

Improving the Welfare Park was the key priority identified following consultation for Glynneath's Community Plan and the Town Council are keen to develop an aspirational vision for the park which meets the needs of the local community, as well as potentially provide an attractive destination for visitors to the area.

The findings in this study will be used to help the Town Council develop more detailed proposals, which will form the basis of funding applications.

Aims for the study

The study aimed to:

- explore the current strengths and weaknesses of the park;
- identify options for improving the park for existing users; and
- explore opportunities for broadening the range of use.

Through this research we essentially wanted to provide Glynneath Town Council with a strong case for investment along with priorities and options for how the park could be improved.

We have included options for both capital investment along with opportunities for broadening its use through a programme of activities and events.

Limitations

The focus of the study was on identifying options for improving the park; the brief and budget did not allow for consideration of detailed design or survey work, any drawings for proposals, or estimates of capital costs.

It is also important to note that the entirety of this study was completed during various restrictions related to the Covid-19 pandemic. We were able to carry out a detailed (socially distanced) site visit, which was coupled with our existing knowledge of the town from other work (including separately for the County Council).

All interviews and survey work were carried out remotely due to social distancing and lockdown restrictions in force during the period in which the study was to be conducted.

Our approach

The study began with a meeting with the Town Council, to gather background information and to better understand its aspirations and limitations.

Two site visits were carried out to identify the site constraints, connectivity and key issues from a design perspective and to follow-up after the consultative phase.

The consultative phase of the work involved in-depth research with existing users and the wider community. We designed a short visitor e-survey, which was promoted via: Facebook; the Town Council's website; and cascaded through stakeholder contacts.

In addition to the e-survey, a paper version of the survey was also posted out to targeted households near to the park; in order to ensure that people without access to the internet could engage in the research.

Overall, 459 surveys were completed electronically, and 245 hard copy versions were returned, resulting in a total response rate of 704 returns.

As the population of Glynneath is approximately 4,300 (2011 Census) a sample size of 353 would be sufficient to provide a statistically significant response, with a 95% confidence level and 5% margin of error.

As well as the response rate being excellent in terms of providing us with meaningful data, it also clearly demonstrates the level of interest the local community have in Welfare Park and it is an indicator of how well valued the park is locally.

Alongside the survey, we also carried out a series of 11 semi-structured qualitative telephone interviews with key stakeholders to develop a detailed understanding of the park's strengths and weaknesses, and priorities for improvement.

Overall, the following stakeholders have been consulted in order to produce this report:

- Glynneath residents and park users/visitors from the local community;
- the two primary schools (Cwmnedd Primary and YGG Cwmnedd);
- Glynneath Library;
- Glynneath Training Centre;
- Football Club (seniors);
- Glynneath Rugby Club;
- Tennis Club (juniors); and
- 4 Town Councillors.

This report combines the consultative work (section 2) with our own site visits and urban design/regeneration analysis.

Report structure

Section 2 of the report details the findings of the consultative work.

Section 3 provides a site location analysis drawn from our site visits and provides recommendations for how the park might be improved.

Section 4 provides a summary conclusion and recommendations and suggested next steps.

2. Consultation results

This chapter draws on the results of the visitor survey and the stakeholder interviews in order to better understand who currently uses (and does not use) the park, visitor habits and satisfaction levels, along with priorities for improvement.

Who visits

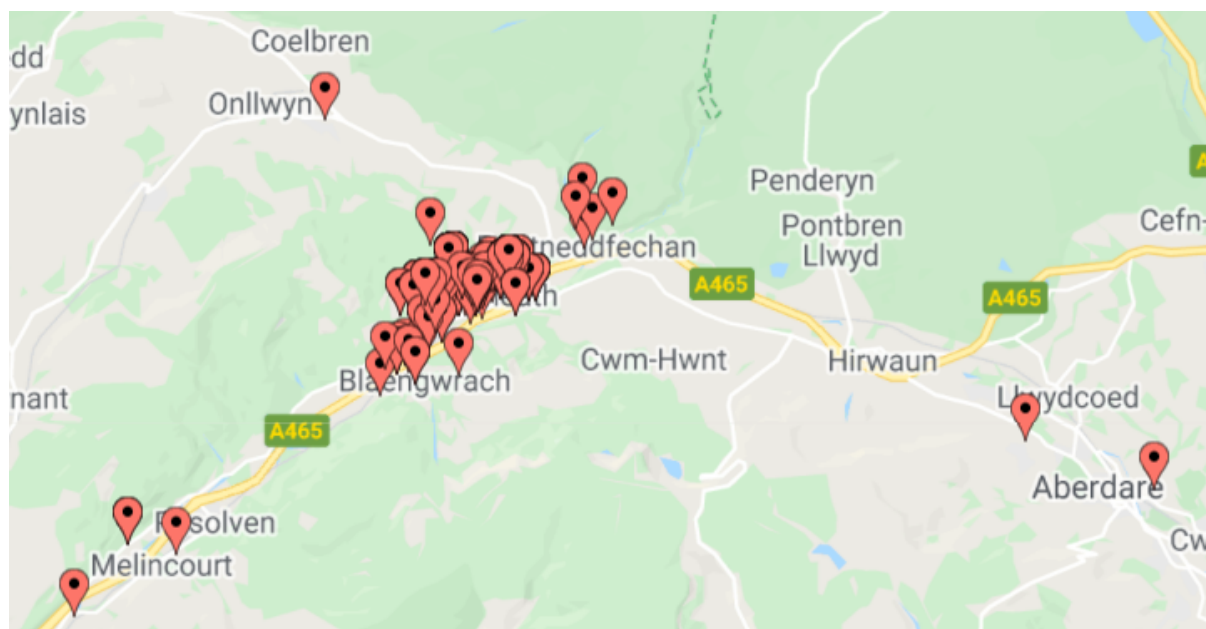
The results of the visitor survey can be used to provide a better understanding of who uses and does not use the park currently. It is important to note that the survey was only circulated amongst local Facebook pages and households, and as face to face surveys with people actually using the park were not possible due to Covid-19 restrictions, the results will be limited to local people.

Of the 704 survey respondents, 400 gave consent to share their personal details, so this first section of the analysis considers data from these 400 respondents only.

Catchment area

Analysis of postcode data in the visitor survey shows that, unsurprisingly, the majority of visitors live in Glynneath. Of the survey respondents who provided their full postcode, 97% live in SA11 5 (Glynneath town postcode area) and 3% live outside the town, as shown in Figure 1 below.

Figure 1 – Catchment area

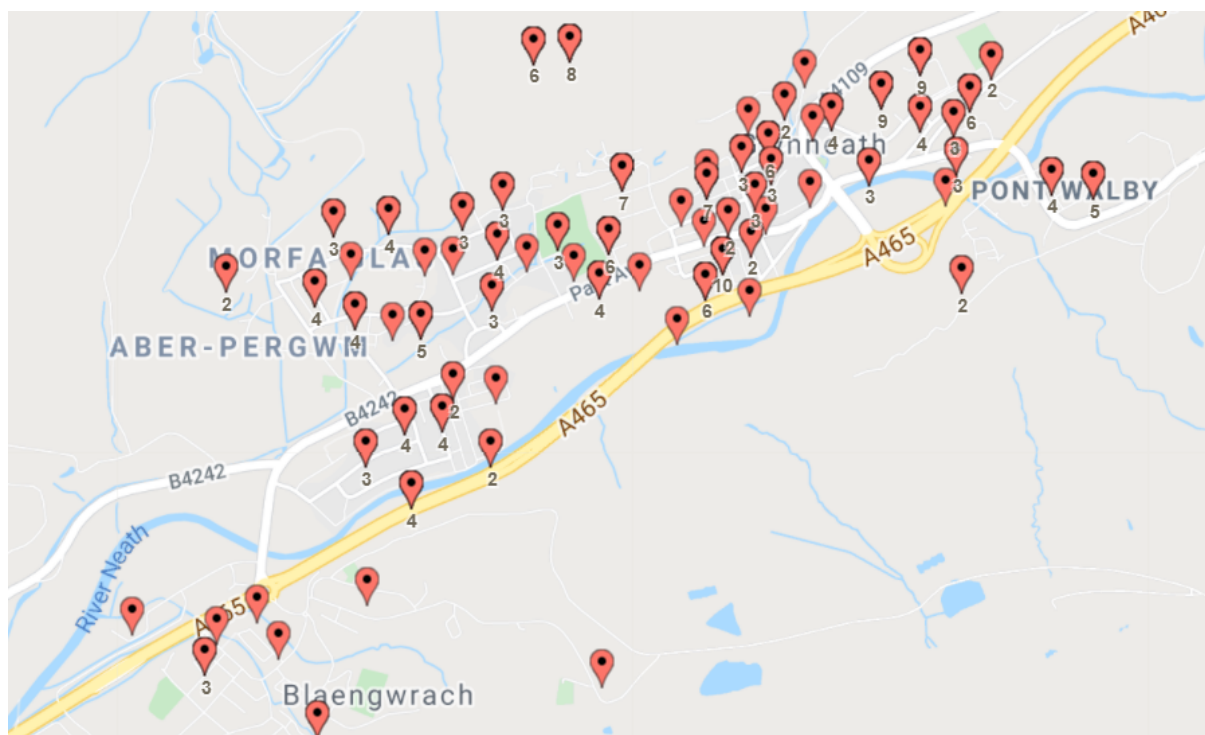


A zoomed in version of this map (Figure 2), which just focuses on visitors who live in Glynneath, shows a good spread across the town and surrounding villages. Welfare Park itself can be seen as the greenspace in the centre of the map. Using the Lower Super Output Areas from the 2019 Index of Multiple Deprivation, we can see that:

- 46% of visitors live in Glynneath 1;
- 35% live in Glynneath 2;
- 14% live in Blaengwrach; and
- the remaining 5% live in Aberdare, Cathays, Onllwyn, Resolven or Tawe-Uchaf.

Around half (52%) of visitors live in relatively deprived neighbourhoods (top 20% or 30% most deprived neighbourhoods in Wales).

Figure 2 – Catchment area



These findings demonstrate that (survey limitations notwithstanding) the park is currently very much a local town park, serving the town and surrounding villages.

Although there is the potential for plans to consider the potential of expanding the catchment area and providing more of a 'destination' for visitors, it is equally important to ensure that any plans first meet the local community's needs.

Visitor profile

The visitor survey can also provide an estimate of who uses the park, and we can compare this to Census data on the population of Glynneath to determine any under-represented groups.

The survey shows that currently more women than men use the park; 68% of female visitors compared to 32% male. Women tend to complete surveys more often than men, however this may indicate there may be a gender imbalance of visitors (the gender split of Glynneath is even at 50% female and 50% male).

Figure 3 below shows the age profile of visitors who completed the survey, compared to the population of Glynneath (as at the 2011 Census). Some caution is needed when interpreting these results, as some groups are more likely to complete surveys than others (e.g. young people are less likely overall).

However, it shows that for people aged 45 or older, the proportion of people who visit Welfare Park is similar to the wider population, whereas there are much fewer younger people (aged 16-24 and aged 25-34) who visit the park compared to the wider population. The proportion of visitors aged 35-44 is greater than the wider population.

It is important to note that the table does not include children (the nature of circulation remotely on Facebook and through doors means that the survey work was inevitably completed by over-18s). However, 44% of people who completed the survey visit with young children (aged 0-11 years) and 18% visit with older children (11-18 years), which suggests that the park caters well for younger children, but less well for teenagers/young adults.

This data suggests that more could be done to engage younger age groups to use the park.

Figure 3 – Visitors by age group

Age group	% who visit Welfare Park	Glynneath Population
16-24	3%	10%
25-34	17%	23%
35-44	20%	12%
45-54	16%	13%
55-64	17%	14%
65-74	16%	12%
75+	12%	11%

19% of visitors to the park report that they have a long-standing illness, disability or infirmity.

This compares to 29% of the wider population who reported in the 2011 Census that they have health conditions that limit their day to day activities.

This suggests that more could be done to improve accessibility which would enable more disabled people or people with health conditions to visit the park.

98% of visitors identify as White British/Welsh, which is the same as the wider population.

Specialist groups/clubs

In addition to general visitors, the park also benefits from a number of organised clubs

who use the facilities. Currently, the park is used by:

- **Glynneath Town Football Club (seniors and juniors):** both clubs have relatively large membership bases (e.g. the seniors have 50 members and 3 teams) and the pitch is used for weekly training and home matches. They also run outdoor festivals and community events from the park.
- **Glynneath Rugby Club:** the rugby club do not regularly use the pitch at Welfare Park (as they have their own facilities at their club nearby), but their membership numbers are increasing, which will mean they are likely to need the second pitch at the park.
- **Glynneath Tennis Club (seniors and juniors):** similar to the football club, the tennis club has a relatively large membership (e.g. 35 junior members) and use the courts for lessons, competitions and tournaments (the juniors normally use the courts twice a week in summer and once in winter). The club uses the courts free of charge and charges its members a small membership fee to pay for the costs of balls and equipment etc. The courts are then available for the public to use the rest of the time.
- **Glynneath Bowls Club:** we were unable to speak directly to the bowls club as part of the consultation as they declined to allow their contact details to be passed on to us via the Town Council, but information from elsewhere suggests a relatively small membership (approx. 10), who use the bowling green.

Conversations with representatives from the Rugby, Football and Tennis clubs have highlighted the following issues with the existing facilities:

- lack of floodlights on the pitches and tennis courts, which limits their use to daylight hours;
- significant issues of flooding, which means that pitches are often unusable;
- tennis courts have not been resurfaced since 2007 – ideally they should be resurfaced every 3-4 years;
- issues with dog mess and litter means that the sports facilities are often in a poor condition for the clubs; and
- changing rooms need modernising and currently have a poor design.

Both the football and tennis clubs stated that the sports facilities are currently under-used, but said that this is due to the condition of the facilities, not a lack of demand.

Due to drainage issues, football training sessions are frequently cancelled and the club has to pay to train elsewhere, and the tennis club is unable to run professional tournaments or competitions on the courts as the condition is unsuitable.

“We would hate to lose the courts. We want to see our numbers increase, but the quality [of the courts] needs to improve first”

(Tennis Club)

“The pitch is under water when it rains. We have to go elsewhere”

(Football Club)

Both clubs are extremely keen to expand on their membership base (in particular younger people) and support the community through activities and events, but are unable to do this while the park is in its current condition.

The Tennis Club has also had conversations with Tennis Wales (the National Governing Body) and there are opportunities to bid for match funding to support improvements to the courts, as well as support new projects to engage more people in the club.

The Tennis Club has lots of ideas around how to work with the schools, Glynneath Training Centre and other community groups in order to expand the club's membership and engage more groups, for example people with disabilities.

"We would love to do a joint project with Glynneath Training Centre and Tennis Wales, with a focus on getting kids and families playing. Focusing on health and wellbeing, learning social skills, leadership skills, being outdoors"

(Tennis Club)

"We do a lot of charitable activities, and would be keen to do more. More events, more projects like walking football etc."

(Football Club)

In addition to these organised clubs, the two primary schools also use the park on an ad hoc basis, for games, sports days and community events. Conversations with both schools suggest a strong desire to use the park more often, for curriculum-focused activities as well as sport and recreation.

"It's a good venue – there's plenty of grass for playing games, kicking a ball around etc., it's really good for nursery and reception years – they use it for picnics and practical activities/games. We also use the pitches when we can't use the rugby club pitch and we have run a few school sports days there in the past. [But for school trips] we currently go to Gnoll Park, which means we have to hire a bus and it's a 25 minute trip. We would love to do the same at Welfare Park as it's only a 5 minute walk so we could go more often and it would be cheaper, and we could stay for longer"

(Primary School)

Glynneath Training Centre also currently use the park for family days and community events, and would like to do more. However, the current condition means that that they are currently limited in how they use the park.

Suggestions for what improvements the clubs, Training Centre and schools would like which would enable them to make better use of the park are detailed later in the report.

Visitor habits

Figure 4 below shows that almost half (49%) of visitors use the park at least on a weekly basis, indicating it is generally well used.

Figure 4 – Frequency of visits

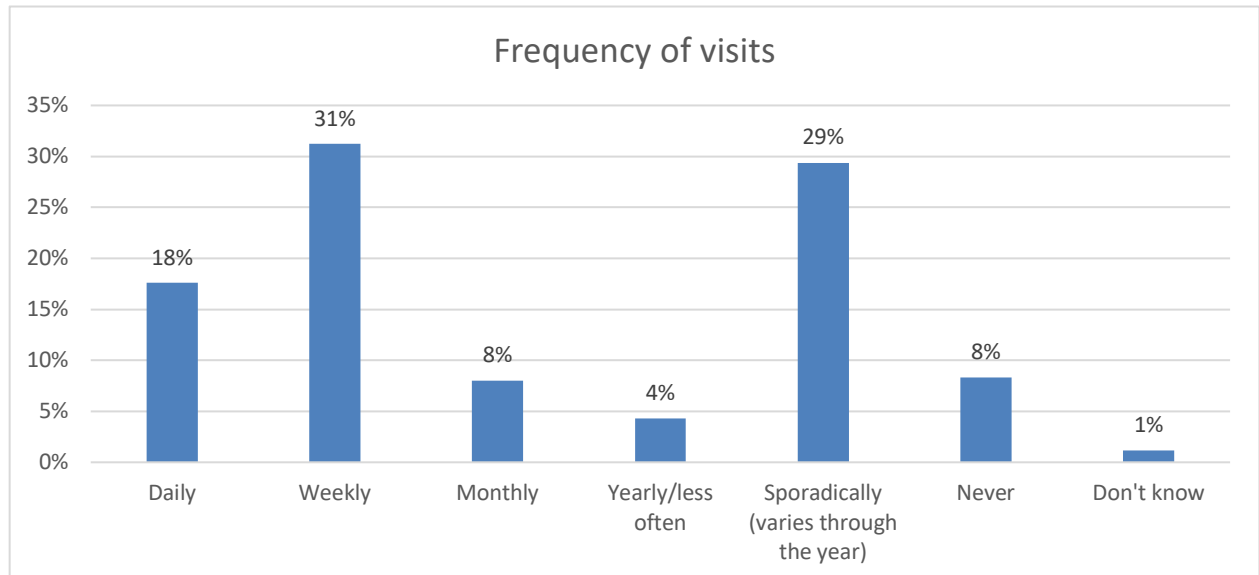


Figure 5 below shows that there are no real strong patterns of use during different times of the day, with most people visiting at a range of different times. However, only a very small percentage use the park before 9am. There is also no real seasonal variation in when people visit, although fewer people visit after 4pm in Autumn/winter.

Figure 5 – Times of visits

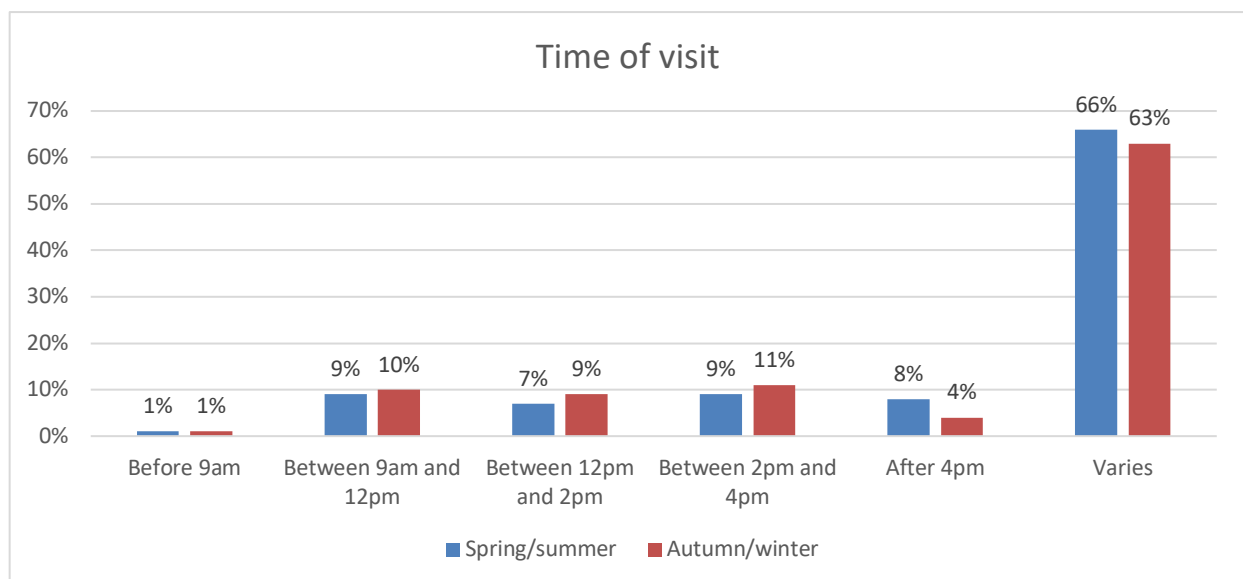


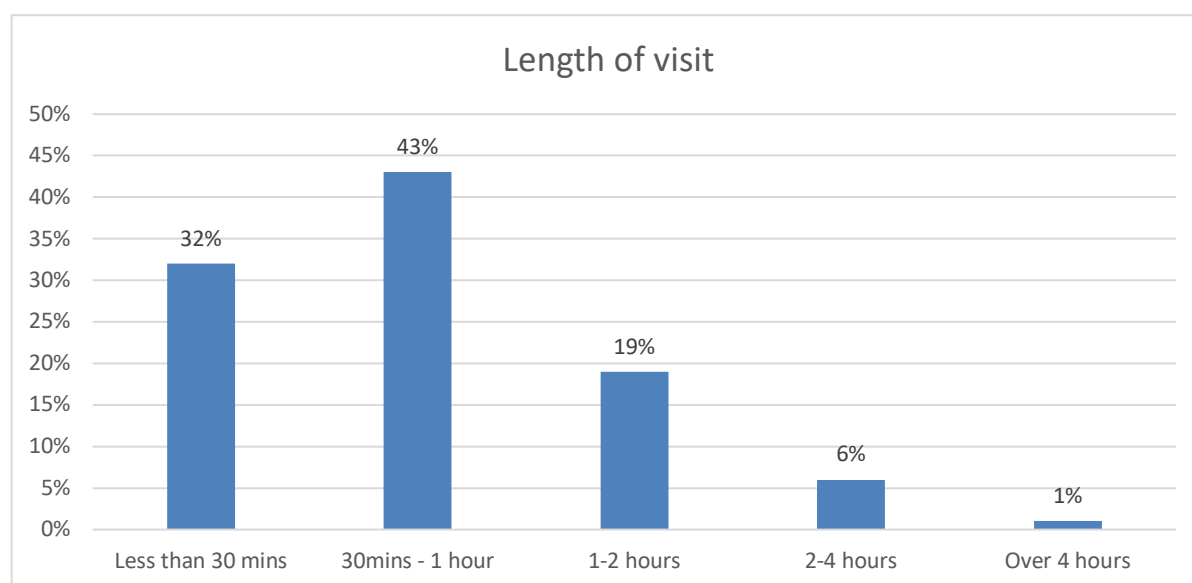
Figure 6 below shows that the majority of visitors (75%) spend no more than 1 hour in the park.

This suggests that more could be done to provide facilities that encouraged people to stay for longer.

“One of the largest parks in the valleys and you will struggle to entertain a child half hour”

(Visitor)

Figure 6 – Length of visit



The majority (85%) of people visit the park as a group, with only a third (35%) visiting on their own (or with a dog).

The most common groups are adults with young children (44%), followed by adults with older children (18%) and then just adult groups (13%).

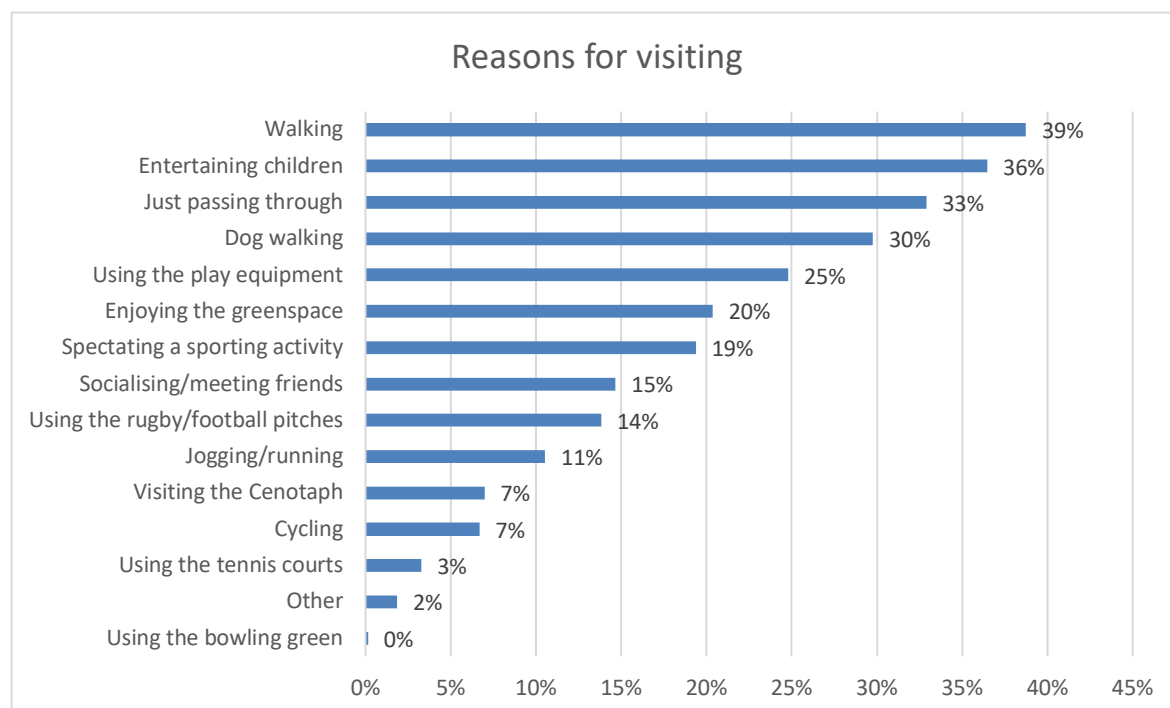
Visitor use

Figure 7 (overleaf) shows the most popular reasons for visiting the park.

It shows that the most popular are for walking, entertaining children and people just passing through.

Only a very small percentage of people visit the park to use the bowling green or tennis courts.

Figure 7 – Reasons for visiting



How often people use facilities

Figure 8 (overleaf) shows how often visitors use the park's existing facilities.

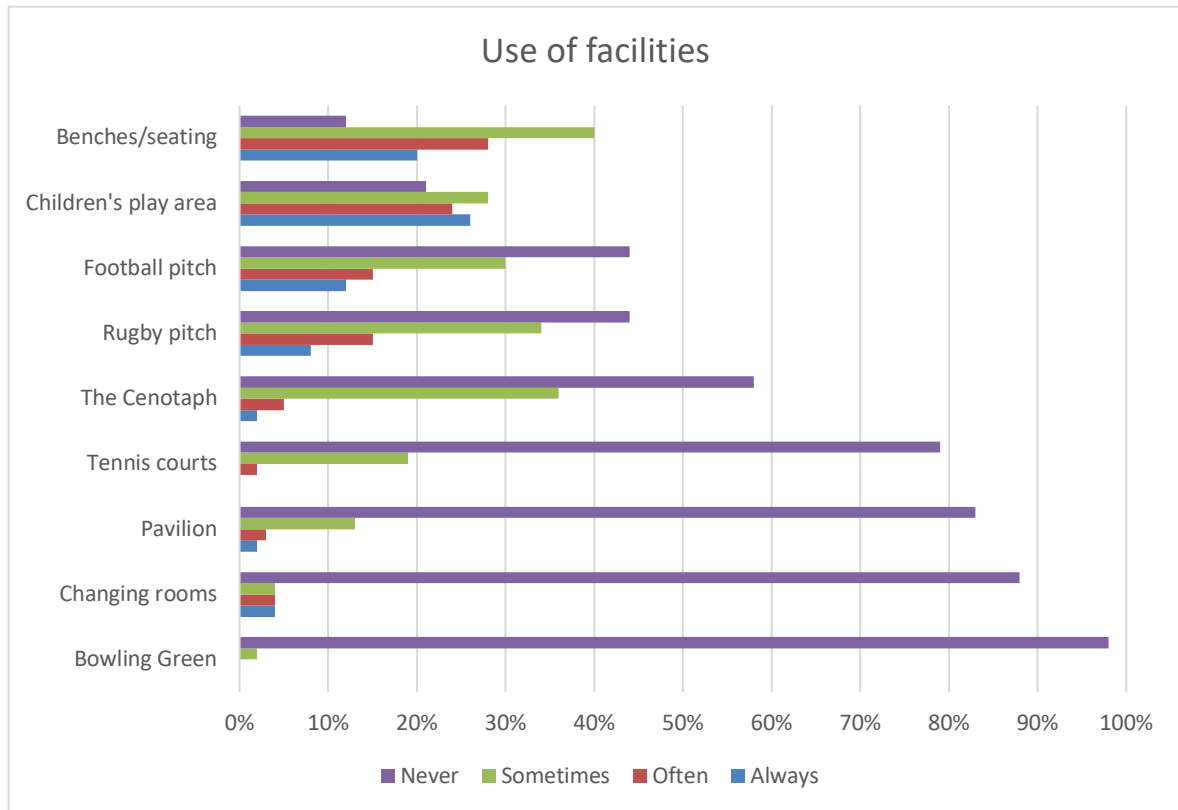
It shows that the benches/seating and children's play area are most well used, and the bowling green is least well used, with 98% of visitors never using it.

There are opportunities to increase the use of most facilities. However, the extremely large percentages of visitors who never use the bowling green and buildings does question whether these are either necessary, or should be opened up to allow them to be used more often.

It is clear that currently the bowling green, changing rooms and pavilion are only used by a very small percentage of general visitors, and there may be opportunities to change or extend their use which would enable more people to use them.

In part, the low use of the changing facilities likely reflects the poor pitch quality, and usage of pitches and therefore changing spaces may increase if drainage, dog fouling and general pitch improvements are resolved. This will require some further consultative work at detailed design stage.

Figure 8 – Use of facilities



Visitor satisfaction

The visitor survey explored users' views on the quality of the facilities they used.

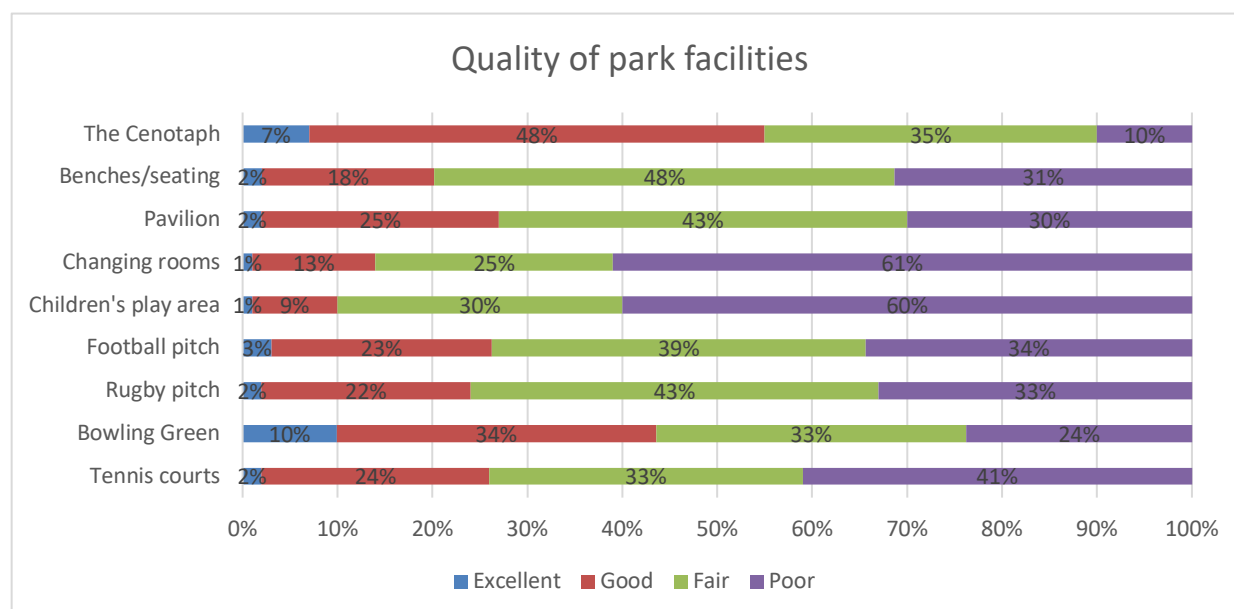
Figure 9 below shows that the majority of visitors rate all the facilities as either 'fair' or 'poor', with the exception of the Cenotaph, which was rated more favourably.

Despite the children's play area being the most used facility in the park, it is also rated the poorest in terms of quality, with 90% of visitors rating both the play area and the play equipment as either fair or poor.

Overall, 90% of park visitors rated the quality of the park facilities in general as fair or poor, with 60% rating them as poor.

The results show that there is potentially a need to improve all the existing park facilities, should the decision be to keep them.

Figure 9 – Quality of facilities



"Children's play area is so dated, the facilities are not fit for purpose"

(Visitor)

"Playground swings are often missing and ground could be in a better condition"

(Visitor)

"I used to use the park as a child every day then growing up and having children of my own the facilities got so dirty and unsafe I prefer not to stay and just pass through"

(Visitor)

Figure 10 below shows satisfaction levels with other features of the park, including access, condition, quality of the greenspace and information provided to visitors.

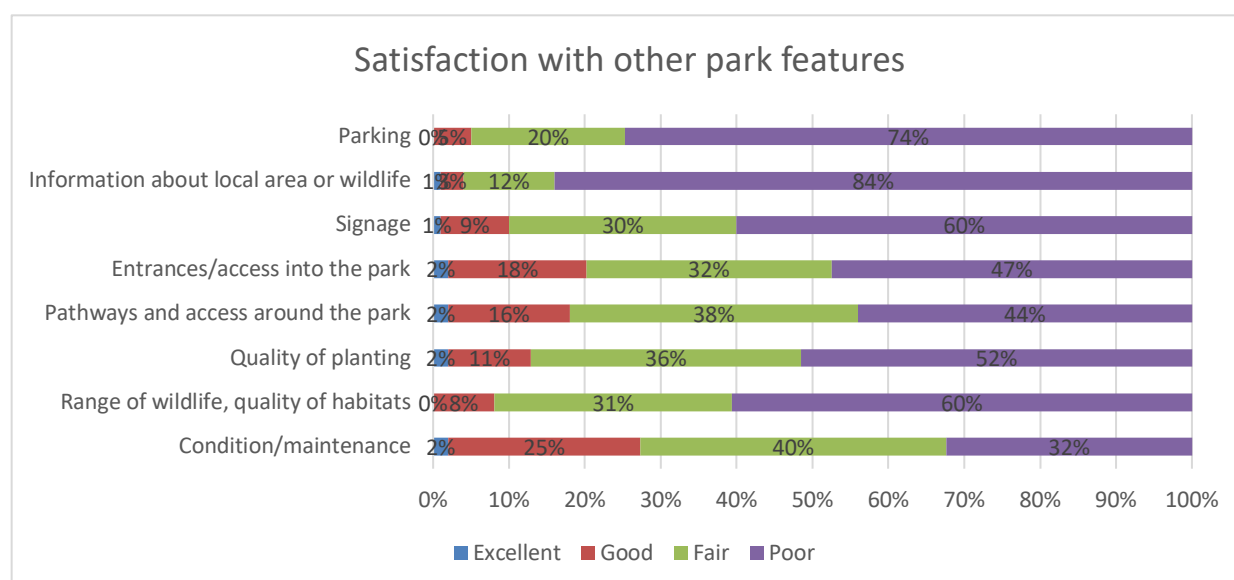
Again, it shows low levels of satisfaction across all areas, and demonstrates a need to improve overall condition, planting and habitats, access and signage/information.

Many survey respondents also referenced litter in the brook/stream that runs through the park and the issues with drainage, particularly on the sport pitches.

“Clearing the stream through the park will help with the overall appearance.”

(Visitor)

Figure 10 – Satisfaction with other park features



Overall, 61% of visitors are dissatisfied with the park as it currently is, 19% are neither satisfied nor dissatisfied and only 17% of visitors are currently satisfied.

This demonstrates a strong need for investment to improve the quality of facilities and park features.

“It’s clear the park is looked after, the grass is cut etc. However what’s actually available is poor. Broken benches, broken toys at the park and lack of toys seen as it’s such a big space”

(Visitor)

“As a young adult, who has grown up with the welfare park being the “place to be”, and spent majority of my childhood and teen years here, I believe it has gone slightly downhill. The park itself is not maintained enough for the children to play, the benches are falling apart, and there’s just not enough there for teenagers anymore.”

(Visitor)

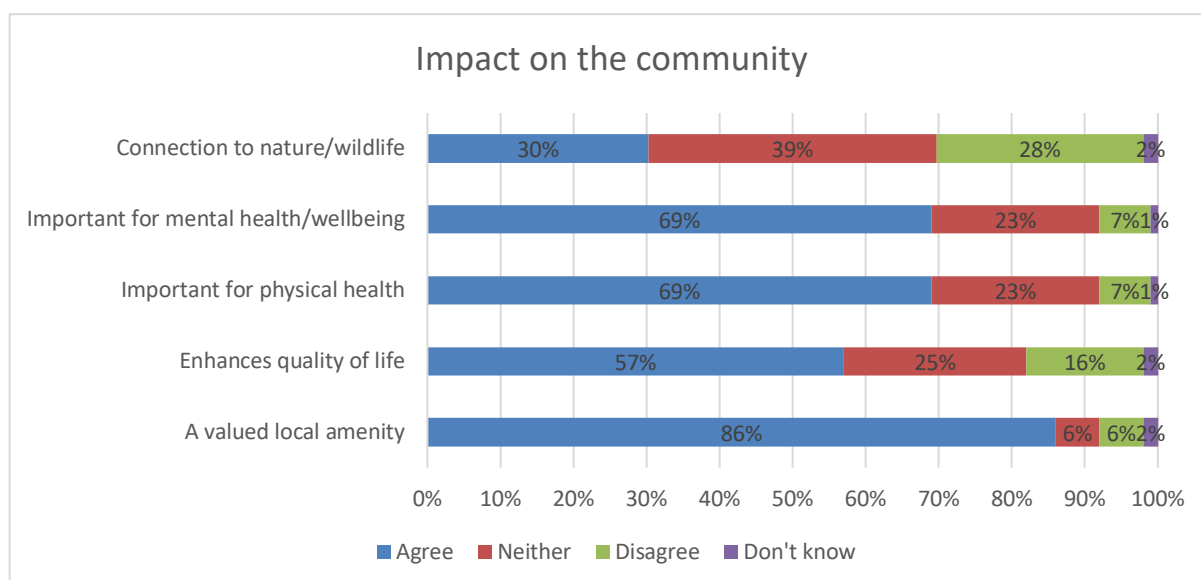
Impact on the community

As well as visitors' use and satisfaction with Welfare Park, the survey also explored the wider impact the park has on the local community.

Figure 11 shows that, despite the very low levels of satisfaction with the park, it is a highly valued and valuable community resource, with the majority of visitors reporting that visiting the park is important for their health and wellbeing and overall quality of life.

The one area which could be improved is the extent to which visitors feel connected to nature and wildlife as a result of visiting; improving the planting and habitat enrichment or improvements, along with information about the nature and wildlife present may help to increase this.

Figure 11 – Impact on the community



"It's a glorious space! It needs to be loved, appreciated and cared for"

(Visitor)

"It is looking tired. It needs a bit of a lift. It is a great park which I have used as a child and am now using as an auntie and for work with children 6-18 (with varying disabilities). Just needs a bit of tender loving care."

(Visitor)

"It's a really valued and used park, lots of families, older people and children use it. But it has deteriorated over time"

(Stakeholder)

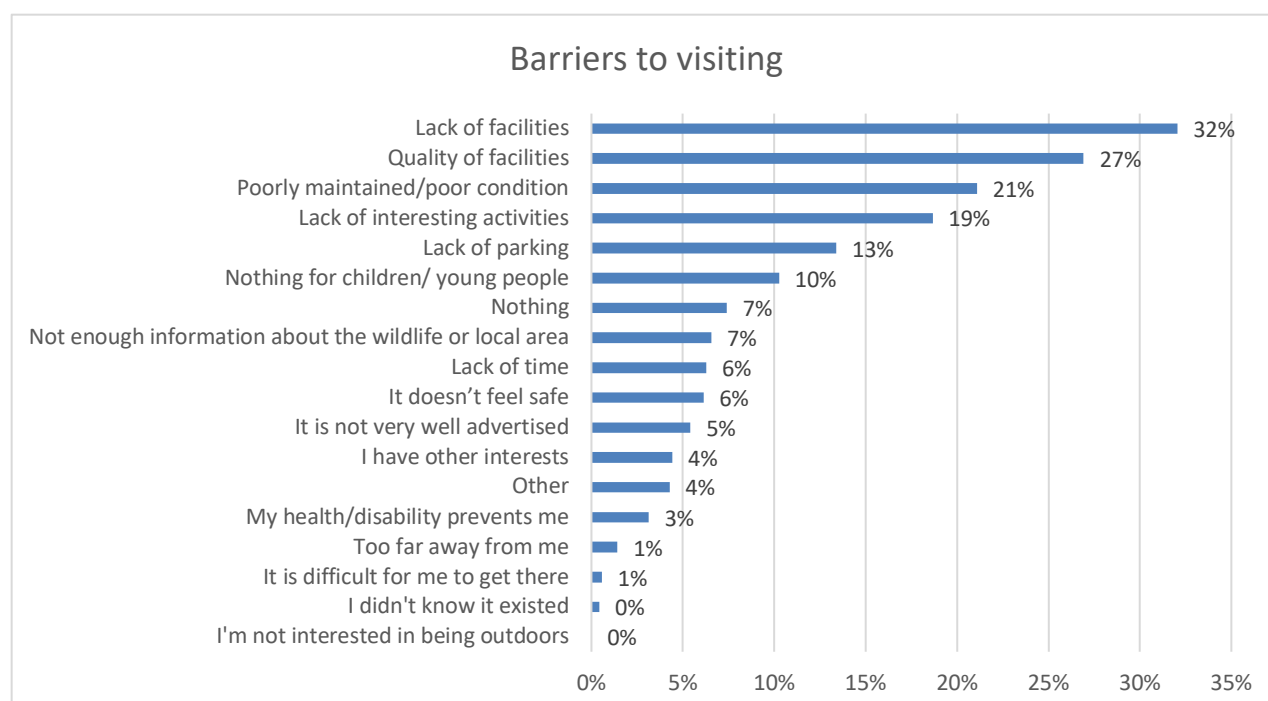
Barriers to visiting

The survey also explored reasons why people do not visit the park, or aspects of the park that limit visitors' enjoyment or experience (Figure 12).

The most common barriers to visiting Welfare Park are the lack and quality of the facilities, the condition and maintenance, and the lack of interesting activities taking place.

This demonstrates the need for both capital investment, but also the potential to develop a range of community activities and events that give people other reasons to visit.

Figure 12 – Barriers to visiting



"I have young children and would love to see a fully functional playing area for them, the children always want to go to the park but we do avoid this park and go to Cwmgwrach park as it is more suitable for them to play in, the Welfare park has so much potential"

(Visitor)

Improvements

The survey and conversations with stakeholders explored what the community wanted to see improved about the park (Figure 13 overleaf).

Although there are many options for how the park could be improved, and lots of ideas

about new facilities which could be included, the survey results and wider consultation can help to prioritise what improvements visitors would like to see take place.

The results show that the top 5 improvements that users would like to see are:

- public toilets;
- somewhere to buy refreshments;
- more and improved facilities for children and young people;
- improvements to the existing sporting and play facilities; and
- general improvements to the upkeep and maintenance of the park.

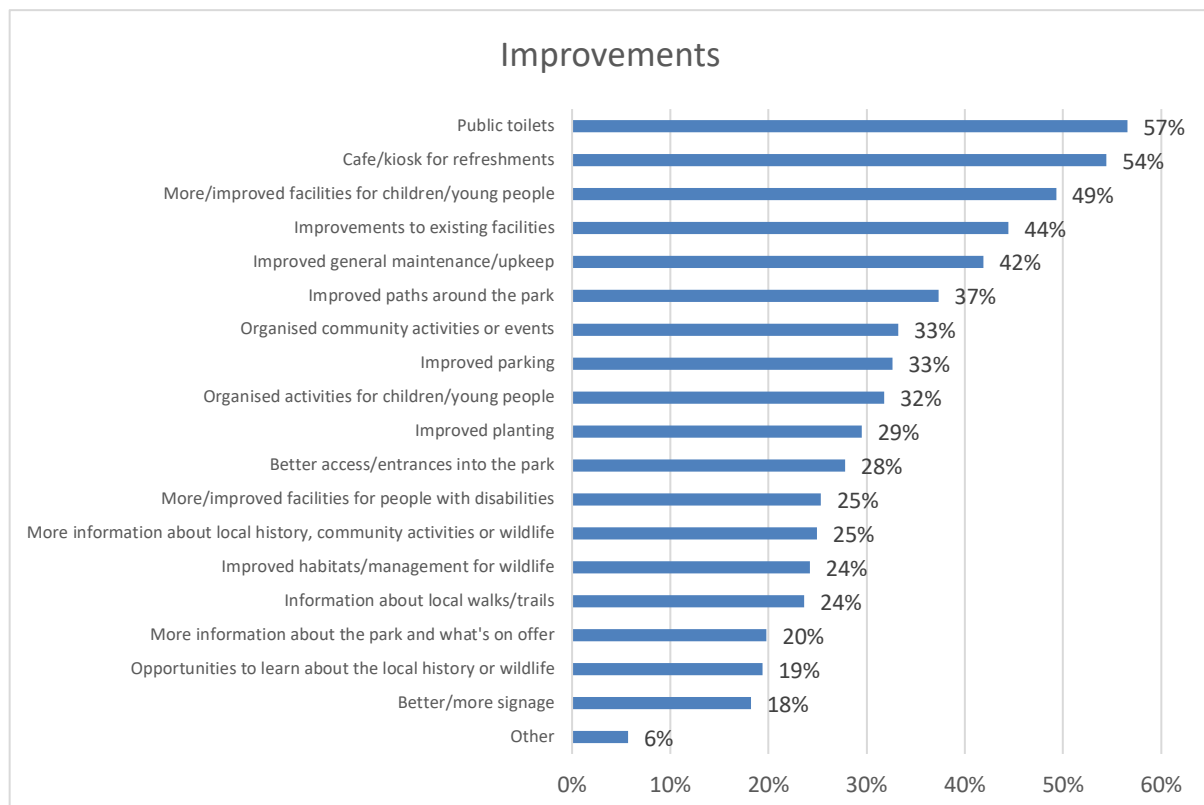
“The park needs more for young children, more park facilities, like more swings and play areas for a variety of young ages. It’s such a big expanse of ground that more should be there for the younger generation.”

(Visitor)

“Better facilities with access to public toilets I think is the biggest issue!”

(Visitor)

Figure 13 – Improvements



Survey respondents also suggested other improvements, including:

- an enclosed area for dogs;
- walking/running/cycling paths;
- improved lighting;
- more bins; and
- picnic benches.

“Everything needs to be improved, as nothing in the park area is fit for purpose and is an embarrassment to Glynneath to be called our main park and sports area. From the non-existent children's play area, that is in desperate need of more equipment for all ages to use. Our run-down tennis courts need updating. Drainage for the waterlogged football and rugby area, plus fencing. Lighting improved, changing rooms renewed, public toilet installed, refreshments shop would be great and a running track and bike/scooter ramp area would be a great addition. The park is the centre of Glynneath and should be somewhere people can meet with friends, sit and have a coffee, take children to play safely, be used to play a variety of sporting activities and a place people like and want to go to. At the moment it is a total waste of an area, lacking all facilities, but could be made into something that benefits the whole community and a place people want to visit”

(Visitor)

Feedback in the visitor survey and conversations with stakeholders also suggest that people would like to see improvements focusing on benefiting the local community, rather than changing Welfare Park from a local amenity to a visitor destination.

“The best improvements would those that would have the maximum benefit to the majority of people. The park certainly has the potential to serve the community”

(Visitor)

“The space has the potential to be something so much more than it is, it could become the hub of the community for all ages”

(Visitor)

To make it viable as a hub of the community. A meeting point for all sorts of community ventures and events. Something we can be proud of and for it to be properly maintained and cared for by a passionate committee ... for all those who are looking for holistic mindful health and well-being for their families and future families to come”

(Visitor)

Priority improvements

Specific ideas or suggestions for improving the facilities for children and young people include:

- separate play areas for younger children and older children/teenagers;
- new play equipment and a range of different equipment for different ages – for example more adventurous play equipment for older children;
- water/splash park;
- skate park; and
- fencing around the playground for safety/security.

Essential improvements to the sporting facilities include:

- new surfaces for the tennis courts;
- address the drainage problems on the football pitches; and
- ensure there is flexibility so the football and rugby pitches can continue to be used for either sport.

Other improvements, which are not considered essential, but would be worth exploring include:

- 3g or 4g football pitches;
- floodlights;
- improvements/expansion to the changing rooms; and
- more seating for spectators.

A small number of respondents to the visitor survey also suggested that the number of tennis courts could be reduced and replaced with other facilities (e.g. a MUGA, basketball court etc.) and the bowling green could be changed so it is able to be used by more members of the community.

“Is there any need of four tennis courts when there is only one played on? Maybe we should keep two tennis courts and use the other two for something else? Basketball pitch, netball pitch, skateboard park”

(Visitor)

“Change one of the tennis courts to a MUGA. Change the bowling green into an area suitable for young children, parent and child friendly.”

(Visitor)

However, other respondents would just like the tennis courts and bowling green to be used by more people, and more often, which suggests that improved maintenance may help achieve this.

“Better maintenance - especially the bowling green and tennis courts”

(Visitor)

“Our run down tennis courts need updating”

(Visitor)

Conversations with the Tennis and Football Clubs (detailed above) suggest that the lack of use is due to the current quality of the facilities, rather than lack of demand, and there is considerable ambition to expand on their use to benefit the community.

It is currently unclear whether this is the case for the bowls club; more work is needed to explore the potential for expanding the use of the bowling green and to better understand the Bowls Clubs’ future plans; if they mirror that of the other clubs and are keen to expand their membership base and do more to support the wider community, then that provides a rationale for keeping and updating the bowling green. If this is not the case, then the Council need to consider the value of retaining a facility that is only used by a very select few.

Conversations with the two primary schools and Glynneath Training Centre have also identified a number of opportunities for broadening the use of the park.

Both primary schools are keen to use the park more frequently for recreation, play and sport, and agreed with the suggestions above for how the play area could be improved.

In addition, they are also keen to use the park for more curriculum-focused activities; for example mini-beast hunts, nature identification and growing projects. Improving the greenspace for the benefit of wildlife would enable the schools to run classes in the park and a small garden/area for raised beds etc. would provide opportunities for the children to take part in growing projects. Some form of covered area and toilets would also be necessary for school trips to take place.

Glynneath Training Centre are also keen to make better use of the park. They currently run a range of training courses, some of which could be delivered in the park. Other environmental projects relating to nature and biodiversity could also be delivered, as well as projects focusing on health and wellbeing, if facilities were provided. Ideas included:

- nature walks;
- healthy eating/growing projects;
- wellbeing/mindfulness sessions; and
- yoga/tai chi in the park.

There are also opportunities to partner with other organisations (e.g. the local leisure centre, Neath Port Talbot Youth Service and the Family Information Service) regarding the potential for holiday clubs and other play provision in the park.

For this to happen, the park would need:

- toilets;
- parking;

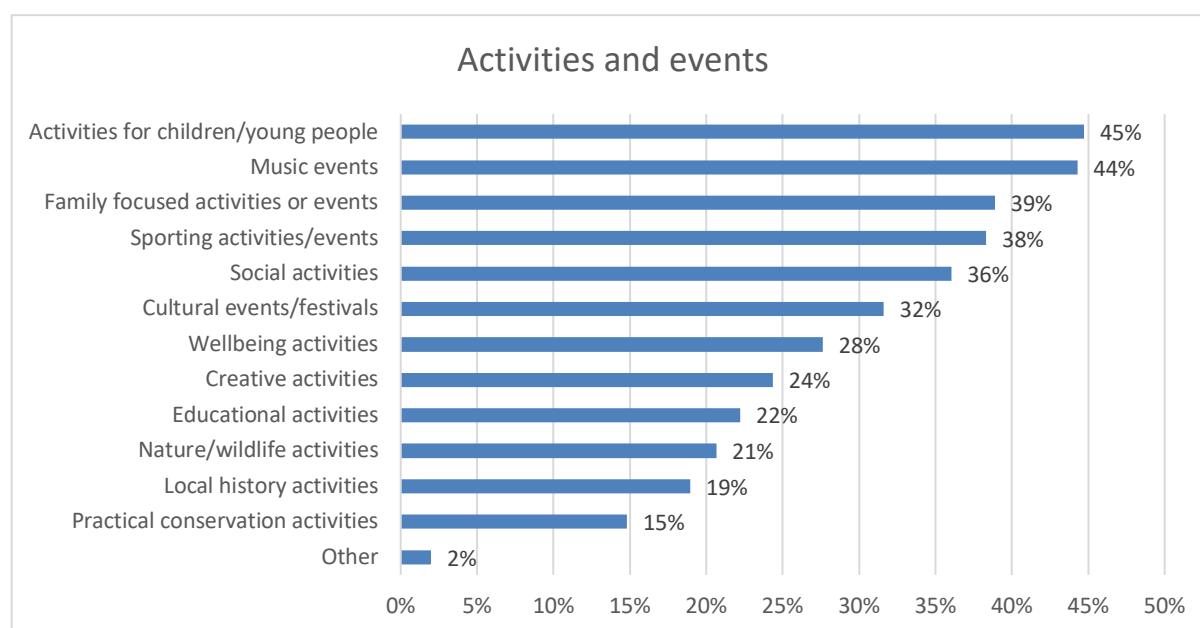
- water supply;
- shelter;
- possibly a classroom/meeting room; and
- room for storage.

Activities and events

As demonstrated above, as well as improvements to the features and facilities within the park, there is also interest in improving the range of community events and activities that take place in the park.

Figure 14 below shows that the most popular are activities for children and young people, music events, family activities, and sporting activities.

Figure 14 – Activities and events potential



“Family days etc. would be great, I remember them as a child at this very park, no idea why it’s not happening anymore.”

(Visitor)

“I would like to see more outdoor activities or events in the space that’s available for the community”

(Visitor)

Again, for these to take place the park would need adequate facilities such as parking, toilets and potentially some indoor/covered space, as well as space for events equipment (e.g. stage), and lighting (the latter designed to be sensitive to surrounding

residences, but sufficient to allow for use of the park in darker winter evenings). A power supply suited for external use would also be a worthwhile investment.

As well as capital investment to provide adequate facilities for a range of activities and events, the Council would also need to consider a source of revenue funding, should they wish to take the lead on running the events.

Alternatively, working with partners may enable events and activities to be delivered by external providers.

3. Site location analysis

The analysis in the following section draws on the findings of Section 2, coupled with a thorough site visit, and desk-based review of the location and related documents.

Assets

Figure 15 (overleaf) provides an analysis of the key considerations for the park (shaded in green) in relation to other local community assets.

The diagram shows that the park is the centre of the town with a substantial proportion of the local community within 5 minutes' walk, and will be seen by many as such; 'a community hub'. It is sat between a focal centre at Chain Walk, and the centre of the town at the Heathfield / Oddfellows Cross.

It contains diverse resources for a wide activity base – tennis, bowls, football, junior football, structured play, seating, changing rooms; informal play.

Further assets include: a brook; a lot of space; some access links to local communities; and proximity of other community assets – library, residential home, and (though not easily accessed) the primary school.

There are also a few fine trees to be preserved.

Walkability and connectivity

In urban design, the walkability of an area (its 'pedestrian catchment') can be analysed by placing a point on the map centred on the community asset and drawing a 400m radius circle. 400m is roughly the distance beyond which it starts to become too far for many people to want to walk.

The park's walking catchment has a good residential density located within it to access the space on foot.

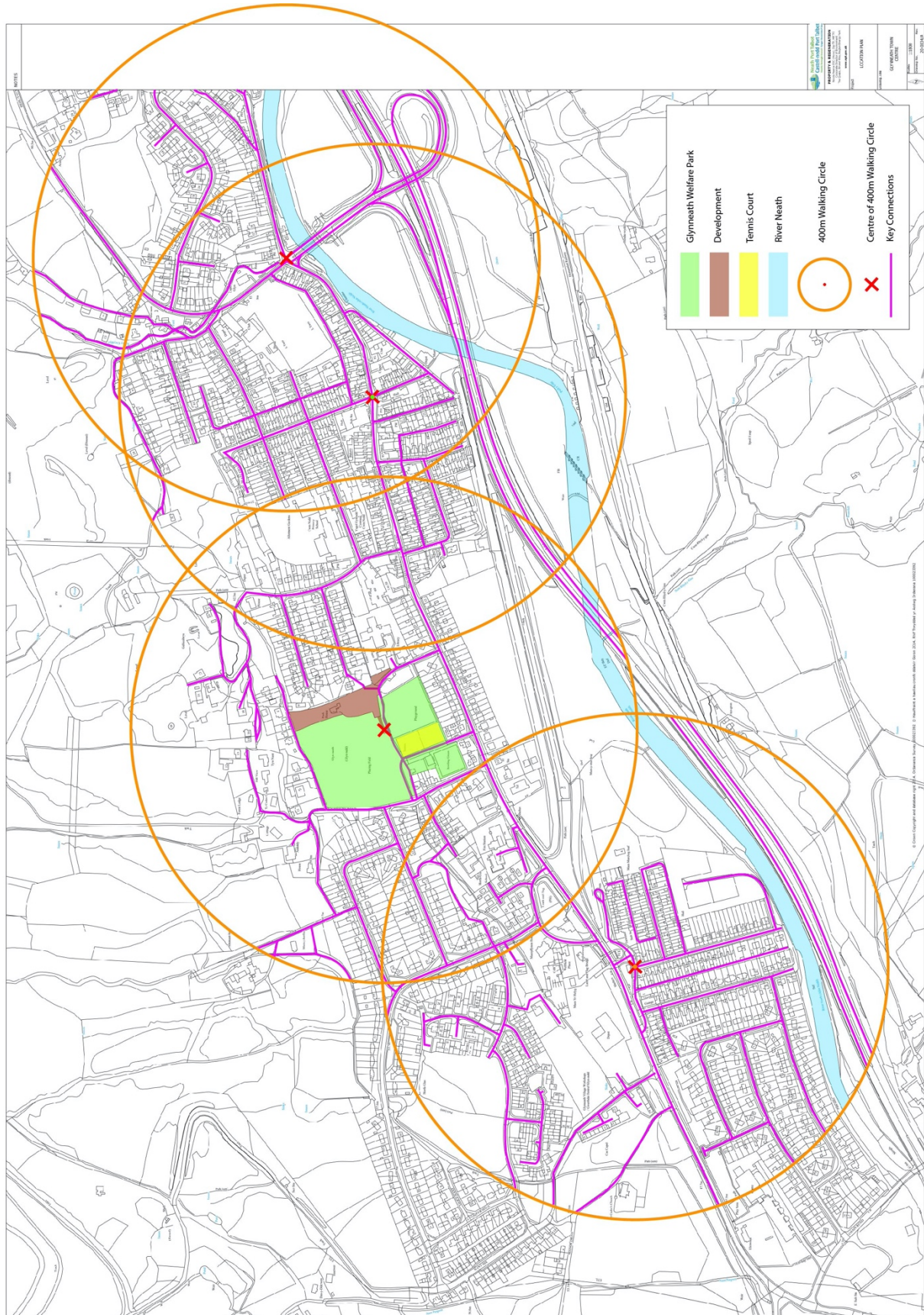
The other important consideration for walkability is connectivity and legibility – how well the space is integrated with its surrounding catchment and how easy it is to navigate that (there should be no more than 2 turns to reach your destination from your home for it to be walkable).

The purple lines on the diagram show streets and how they do or do not connect to it. The park has remarkably poor spatial integration – many links do not 'join up', creating convoluted means of access and/or poor quality access points e.g. to and from homes on the north side (where there are no connections), to the natural environment and walks on the north side. The hillside walk, along the back of town, north side is more happenstance than considered.

Access from the east is very poor – adjoining Rock Street requires about 400m walk round the houses to enter. Access is better to the west but still leaves much to be desired. Entrance points/routes (not least to service the library) need enhancement.

These are significant issues for any community amenity. This is not always easily resolved due to the barriers being the privacy of people's homes and will require further consultative work at design stage. Nevertheless, it is a key determinant of making spaces work.

Figure 15 – Walkability analysis



A third consideration is overlooking – what is called ‘natural surveillance’. This relates to how well surrounding properties (residential, public, and/or commercial) overlook the public realm – the better overlooked, the stronger the natural supervision and the safer and more secure spaces tend to be. Conversely, poorly overlooked spaces tend to be more troublesome.

As well as direct overlooking, there is the direct connectivity between surrounding premises and the space they overlook – overlooking from the fronts of buildings is much better as (if there is an issue) the space can be accessed quickly, whereas when backs of properties overlook space, often to access them, a circuitous route needs to be taken out of the front of the building and around the block to access the space.

Furthermore, when buildings (particularly private residences) back on to public spaces, it exposes their backs and creates further security and privacy issues for those homes.

The park is not well-overlooked, with many ‘backs’ facing it.

Proposed housing development

There is a proposed housing development on the east side of the park (see brown shaded area in Figure 15 and more detailed proposed layout – taken from the planning application – in Figure 16 overleaf).

The proposed housing is both an opportunity and threat for the park, not just in itself but as much in light of the palette of issues.

Construction in the proposed location is a good thing in principle, but presently the proposals are facing the housing units in the wrong direction – facing the backs of the homes on Robert and Rock Streets, themselves seeking privacy and security evidenced with growth, high fencing and some dumping.

The current housing proposal does not remedy the current issues in any way and the same issues of seeking privacy for backs will result, simply moving the issue closer to the park.

The new development should be turned around, back to back with the existing Rock Street/Robert Homes, and with the fronts of the houses facing the park, bounded by an access road and the brook. This will greatly improve their security, visual aspect and value, as well as creating much improved ‘natural surveillance’ of the park.

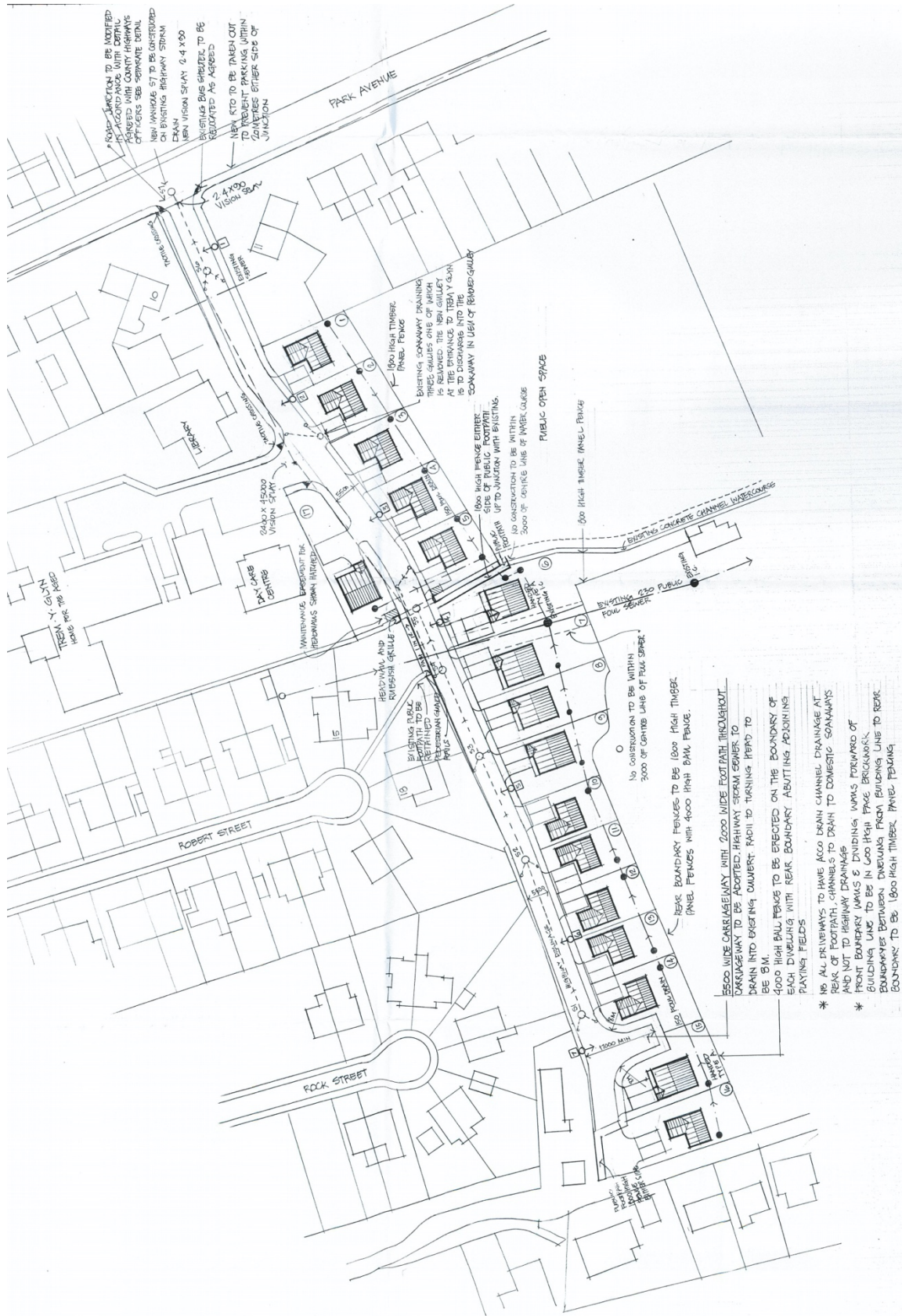
This would also help to secure some of the vulnerable backs of homes on Rock and Robert Streets by placing houses back to back (vehicle access could still be maintained to the fronts).

If there remains scope to do so, the County Council planners should recommend this and the Town Council may consider making representations via the planning process to do this.

We attempted to contact the developer for the proposed new housing on several occasions to discuss these matters, but we received no response.

Along with the access points this is by far the most significant issue to address (if indeed this is still possible). There is even merit in offering to meet any additional costs to the developer of additional professional fees if that would incentivise a change in the design.

Figure 16 – Proposed housing development (sourced from planning application)



Access points

The other key priority is better integration with the wider community and access more generally.

Concentrate on three access points:

- Trem y Glyn/ Library Road as the main access. (note: this is a reference to that roadway and not the care home);
- Earlsfield Close for changing rooms, bowls, tennis and general access; and
- 'Lôn Gelliceibryn' to connect to the 'north walk'.

Each of these is considered in further detail below. The entrance from Addoldy Road could be improved too, but this is of lower priority, unless access from Earlsfield proves to be problematic.

Related to the following more detailed proposals for these access points, road surface colouring and new signage at the main road entrance/ junctions would be a relatively cheap visual enhancement.

Furthermore, there should be consideration of more substantial street features on the main road and at the key entrance points 'announcing' the park (and library), which can further contribute to improving the character of the main road, improving the pedestrian environment and crossing places. This warrants further study and design work in its own right.

Trem y Glyn

The road surface should be improved, possibly in conjunction with the new development.

Most importantly, the area immediately beyond the rear of homes on the left as one enters 'Trem y Glyn' – currently fenced wasteland, privately owned – should be targeted as an open, and spacious entry point to the park. We suggest an agreement with the owner or a possible land-swap. This is not recommended to be car park – see below.

This should be seen as a grand park entrance, with play, walks, environment and sports, and also improvements to the social resources available at the library, all being visibly inviting.

There is strong desire for a café/kiosk from the community, but this needs more measured consideration.

A café is almost certainly not economically viable; most economical at the moment would be to attach a part-time kiosk to the library, which could be given more visible presence at the same time i.e. the landscaped park entrance.

The library and kiosk can be seen as an integrated 'place', also feeding over to the new housing development further on. Public toilet provision for the park can also be consolidated with improvements to the library.

Perhaps create a 'square' there, very much based on the park.

Although tempting, the existing old changing facility in mid park should be demolished in favour of options identified herein.

Earlsfield Close

Open out that entrance. Move the tennis courts (see notes below on reconfiguring pitches) and provide parking there, adjacent to the changing rooms.

‘Lôn Gelliceibryn’ (the lane along the back/north side, with homes facing the park)

The new development, i.e. the 10 homes, should push through the wall and make a proper connection for access to the hillside walks etc. At worst, a ‘kissing gate’, suitable to accommodate wheelchairs, pushchairs and the like should be incorporated.

The link through for pedestrians and others should be located conveniently, visibly, and wide open and not ‘sneaking round the back’, making it unsafe, frightening, and to be avoided out of hours, by women and children etc. (like the path to Robert Street is presently, as shown in Figure 17).

We understand from community consultation that there was desire from the landowner/developer for more space – that creates potential for a land swap deal to achieve the stated aims herein.

Figure 17 – Currently poor access points



Sports pitches

The consultation findings indicate that use of the park will improve with better drainage and removal of the dog fouling issue. Nevertheless, there is potential to rationalise/reorganise some of the provision to better organise/create additional space.

Subject to further discussion, and a more detailed assessment of the drainage issues, there is scope to re-organise the pitch layouts as follows:

Pitches: Full size, say 100m x 75m; Junior 90m x 55m – one large and two small. This would create more space for additional features (e.g. the eco garden proposed below). This is a ‘could’ rather than ‘should’ be done option and will be driven by a firmer understanding of the drainage issues at the park (ideally SUDS in conjunction with the developer).

The consultative work indicates that there is potential to enhance demand for the tennis courts if the quality of facilities can be improved.

At this stage, there is scope to add a new court (perhaps 2) to the side of courts 1 & 2, and to consider other uses for the existing courts 3 & 4 space. A new tennis court, of high quality, could be installed with a surface to be determined by the tennis club and courts 1 and 2 improved. The new court(s) should be located at the play area side (with a view to converting the two west courts to parking – see below).

If this moves forward, then there should be some further discussion with the Tennis Club on this matter.

Kiosk

There was some indication from on-site discussions that the kiosk (Figure 18) is one of few remnants of the Miner's Welfare in the Park and it may warrant retention on that basis.

However, the structure is not fit for purpose and, on balance, should be removed rather than adapting it.

Figure 18 - Kiosk



Any new kiosk should be combined (along with public toilets) with the library building, or in that area.

The commercial viability case for a kiosk will be weak, with scope for some heightened earned income in summer months, but a very difficult commercial outlook most of the year round, which makes it difficult to justify and sustain it.

The base of the current kiosk is likely concrete and rather than remove this, the base might be retained, with a basketball hoop or kickabout wall.

Pavilion

The pavilion is in generally good condition but requires enhancements to the changing facilities; at least two further changing rooms and (potentially if budgets permit) a small club room for the tennis and other users

Additionally, the current access to the changing facilities is poor on both age and gender grounds – players should be able to access their changing spaces and related facilities (toilets/showers) without going through other changing spaces. This can easily be resolved with some investment and augmentation of the building, which should be a high priority.

There is ample room at the rear and side for extension and/or for a separate access to the changing spaces for those with dirty boots.

Furthermore, a storage space should be added for the various items required for grounds maintenance and general management of the park.

There may be a temptation to create a children's play space in the enclosed area at the pavilion but that is not recommended – play should be located near to the entrance points to the park (best at Trem y Glyn, library and new community facilities).

Play and 'hangout' space

The play equipment and seating should be located nearer to access points.

If the proposal for the Trem y Glyn entrance and possible kiosk is an acceptable objective, along with ROSPA considerations, then the play area and seating should be moved over in that direction, at least sufficient to accommodate one, perhaps two, new tennis court(s) as referenced above, helping to create a cluster of resources near the entrance, nearer the school and library; 'a place'.

Consider adding a single basketball net (see example in Figure 19 overleaf) and/or outdoor table tennis table for limited play for older children, probably adjacent to the brook path on the Trem y Glyn side; i.e. visible and accessible; naturally supervised by new homes and general public activity.

A multi-use games area (MUGA) may be considered but they do tend to take up and monopolise space and one is not currently proposed at this location.

Addition of a 'hang about' space for young people might also be considered here (see example in Figure 20 overleaf).

There is often a temptation to locate youth hangout spaces away from homes but this should be avoided. Whilst some distance to reduce disruption from noise is wise, any such space should still be located close enough to be easily seen from neighbouring properties both for the security of the young people themselves, and also to reduce the chances of vandalism and other anti-social behaviour (see note on 'natural supervision' elsewhere).

Local young people should be involved in the design of such a provision.

Figure 19 – Stand-alone basketball/netball net



Figure 20 – Example of a children and young people's 'hangout' space



Better connection with the environment

Connecting to the wider natural environment requires greater emphasis.

In light of the poor drainage and limited use of the rugby pitch, it is proposed to convert part of that area into a pond/wetland/eco-garden and walk, to link to the hillside walks. This would be best located adjacent to the new housing development. Ideally, this would be done in conjunction with the housing developer if possible, but if not it should still be pursued in some form.

This will create a small local walking circuit, and contribute to drainage, including for the housing development (SUDS) using the existing brook, bringing it out and extending it as an environmental feature, wildlife garden with lots of planting.

Specialist input is required to advise on this, but these would seem to be almost perfect conditions for this, which ties with potential for a nature area for schools' visits highlighted in the consultation findings.

The park should seek to integrate with local walking routes, particularly on the north side and these should be publicised.

Parking

Parking should be reconsidered. Note this is an overall strategy matter – modest parking should be considered for the library and related activities, for changing rooms, and for the new housing development and its access. The temptation to use the waste ground (mentioned previously) for parking should be resisted in favour of the recommended uses for that space.

This is a major consideration, requiring more detailed design than is possible in this study, but certainly a key issue for further attention.

Whilst it requires further design study, if the proposed reconfiguration of homes suggested above occurs, there is scope to provide parking on the east edge and even into the brook side to alleviate pressure on surrounding roads on match days.

Other issues

Dog fouling on children's play and sport pitches requires a stronger focus on picking up and removing it.

There are requests to fence the play area but whilst that may be worthwhile, that will not solve the issue – there is dog fouling everywhere and it is a serious public health issue that must be addressed.

Furthermore, there were complaints about dogs off leads in relation to children's play, which may require fencing of that area.

There are many and varied solutions to this, but a combination of public awareness raising, dog litter bins located strategically throughout the site with regular regimes for emptying them, and perhaps dispensers with free dog litter bags to encourage pick up.

The common approach is to fence the play area, which might be considered, but doing so presupposes that it is the children that should be fenced in rather than the dogs.

Given the easy access to a much wider natural environment for dog walkers, the priority might be reconsidered to favour play rather than dog walkers in the park (not removing dog walkers, but emphasising priorities).

There are successful examples elsewhere (Figure 21 below) where it is the dog area that is fenced rather than the play.

Figure 21 – Dogs fenced in rather than children (New York)



Engaging the primary schools in a local publicity campaign will highlight that children are most likely at risk from this and would make a worthy project for the Town Council to fund and/or as part of the development stages for upgrade to the park.

Whilst there are clear sensitivities to consider, the War memorial is rather out of place and would ideally be better located nearer to the library but this is lower priority.

4. Conclusions and recommendations

The results of the consultation clearly demonstrate that Welfare Park is a well-used, valued and valuable community resource.

It is highly important to local people, in terms of benefiting their health and wellbeing, but the current condition of the park has led to very high levels of dissatisfaction.

The park has a strong catchment area, with a good residential density located within a 5 minute walking distance, but it is very poorly connected to its surroundings, with weak access points, and poor legibility.

There is a strong desire for the whole park to be significantly improved, with a range of new and improved facilities provided to enhance its condition, attract new audiences, give people more reasons to visit and stay for longer.

Although the park is currently well-used, more could be done to engage more younger people (teenagers and young adults) as well as disabled people. This can be achieved through capital improvements, by providing facilities that appeal to these particular age groups and by improving access. But it can also be achieved by running targeted activities and events that are aimed at specific under-represented groups.

Recommendations

The following recommendations are made with full knowledge that the Town Council is not the landowner of all aspects, or able to dictate certain elements (notably point 1 below and also works on surrounding highways).

Nevertheless, all of the following points need to be addressed, and so a collaborative approach with the County Council, local sports groups and (if possible) the developer should be adopted to progress the regeneration of the park. That makes the process more complex, and certainly the Town Council should drive the approach, but it requires (and warrants) a collaborative approach.

The proposed improvements summarised below will require a relatively substantial capital funding input (amount to be determined through further detailed study) and so any changes should be wrapped into one overall project. Furthermore, without a collaborative approach, the improvements could end up becoming piecemeal and more limited in their potential impact.

Priority outcomes and projects identified through this research that we recommend the Town Council either delivers itself, or seeks to work with others for them to deliver, are as follows:

1. seek arrangement with the developer of the proposed housing if this is not too late (essentially to turn them around, create sustainable urban drainage, and connect to Gelliceibryn);
2. create an eco-garden, consider to what extent reorganisation of pitches can create space (point 6 below), but even if pitch orientations remain the same, this theme should still be pursued for a wildlife/green link from Trem y Glyn to Gelliceibryn – improve the wider drainage, with a pond linked with the eco-garden and explore links to a sustainable urban drainage system for the proposed housing development;

3. significantly improve access points both from the surrounding residential areas and beyond the hillside and wider nature connectivity;
4. move towards a public 'square' (an environmental – park-oriented space rather than hard landscaped) at the library/Trem y Glyn residential park entrance;
5. pursue design of new junction formats to enhance access and 'invitation' to the park from the main road (this should be linked to wider town strategy and improvements), with accompanying pedestrian-oriented improvements as well as signage at Addoldy, Earlsfield, and Trem y Glyn;
6. reconfigure existing sports facilities – create one (perhaps two) new tennis court(s) in new space and move the play area as identified, consider rationalisation of the larger pitches to create one large and two smaller training pitches as identified (to be informed by a more detailed assessment of drainage);
7. create more and better facilities for older children and young people – play as well as 'hangout' spaces that are well-supervised from surrounding homes but sufficiently distanced for noise;
8. consolidate structures – combine toilets and potentially a kiosk with the library building and enhance its facilities; enhance the pavilion with improved changing spaces paying careful attention to differing user groups (age and gender); and
9. overall improvements in maintenance/upkeep, notably in terms of significant improvements in terms of dog fouling.

Additionally, there is strong interest/demand for more community activities/events – the library, primary schools and Training Centre are keen to deliver more activities from the park, and the sports clubs want to do more to engage more members and support the local community. This should be further explored with a dedicated community events budget for the park allocated annually.

Although this research has identified some clear priorities for improvement, there remain some difficult decisions for the Council; namely around the future of the tennis courts and particularly the bowling green. Due to inability to secure contact details we have not been able to link with the bowls club. Whilst other proposals can continue without the input of the bowls club, the picture would be completed with the engagement of that group and development of a stronger understanding of its future.

There is considerable potential to generate funding to run projects, which will increase grassroots membership of sports clubs, providing considerable health and wellbeing benefits. However, although this ambition is shared by the Football Club and Tennis Club, it is currently unclear what the Bowls Club's future plans are.

It is also currently unclear whether four tennis courts are actually needed to achieve these ambitions, or whether some of this space (and that of the bowling green) could be better used. Presently, it is suggested that three (improved) tennis courts would be ample even with heightened use – quality tennis provision on the bowling green area may even be an option, in conjunction with other proposals here.

By providing a mix of capital investment to improve the existing facilities, complemented by an activities and events programme which aims to engage new audiences, the park can increase its reach as well as improve the visitor experience and satisfaction levels. Engagement of the local schools in this process as well as other stakeholders is strongly recommended.

There is clearly the potential to develop an ambitious project that meets the needs of the current users and residents, but also provides an attractive destination for schools, visitors to the area and a range of other stakeholder groups and organisations.

Careful thought needs to be given regarding prioritising improvements, but also sustainability and ongoing maintenance.

Considering income generating activities such as a kiosk, combined with the development of a volunteer group, which could support the park maintenance team as well as help fundraise, will help to ensure that any new investment can be sustained.

Next steps

We suggest that the next steps for the Town Council are:

- immediate efforts to secure engagement with the developer of the proposed housing though if this is unsuccessful it need not hinder the wider recommendations;
- some separate study and design of surrounding roads to enhance them with measures that both signal access to the park but that also double as traffic calming/placemaking measures for the surrounding urban realm;
- develop more detailed designs, which will consider options for access points and maximising use of the space, as well as consider solutions to the drainage problems, dog fouling, and access – this will inform the capital investment plan (some specialist input will likely be required for drainage SUDs/environmental improvements);
- as part of this, more in-depth conversations with the bowls and tennis clubs to determine the future of these facilities is required, and potential with the football/rugby if one large, and two smaller training pitches are pursued;
- creation of an audience development plan (including conversations with a range of potential partners), management and maintenance plan and business plan for a new refreshments kiosk – this will inform the activity/events plan and need for revenue funding; and
- consider the potential to create a Friends of Welfare Park or other volunteer group, which could support maintenance, fundraising and potentially support the running of the café/kiosk.

Once this work has been completed, the Town Council will have fully costed proposals and a robust consultative process to discuss with potential funders. Subject to the criteria of chosen funder(s), it may be that most or all of the above can be incorporated as phase one (detailed design) and combined with the larger capital project.

It is already abundantly clear that the park is a vital community asset, but one that is significantly underachieving in large part due to the need for significant investment.

Some further study (notably design and related further consultation) is required, but this is a worthwhile investment of public funds and as good a case as there is in terms of community need and aspirations. Further pursuit of public funding to support the development of the park as outlined herein is clearly urgently needed and is strongly recommended.