

TONBRIDGE & MALLING BOROUGH COUNCIL
COMMUNITIES and HOUSING ADVISORY BOARD

26 February 2019

Report of the Director of Street Scene & Leisure and Technical Services

Part 1- Public

Matters for Recommendation to Cabinet - Non-Key Decision (Decision may be taken by the Cabinet Member)

1 HAYSDEN COUNTRY PARK – USER SURVEY RESULTS

Summary

This report informs Members on the results of the 2018 casual user survey carried out at Haysden Country Park, and brings forward potential improvements for Member consideration. The results show high levels of user satisfaction.

1.1 Introduction

1.1.1 A casual user survey was undertaken at Haysden Country Park during the summer of 2018 and consisted of 402 face to face interviews. The interviews were conducted at various locations within the Park, over 15 separate days. A separate on-line survey was also undertaken with clubs and organisations using the Park. These comments will be shared with the Chairman of Tonbridge Sports Association. This reports presents the results of the onsite casual usual survey similar to that undertaken in 2013. Results from this survey will be reflected in the sites next five year Management Plan.

1.1.2 The 2018 survey covers three main areas:

- Characteristics of market and patterns of use, including diversity;
- Customer assessment/satisfaction of the existing facilities;
- Identifying customer needs for the future.

1.1.3 The survey enables the Council to gauge current feedback from visitors to the Park and assess the impact of improvements and investments made to the Park since the last survey in 2013. Since the last survey the following improvements have taken place: additional play equipment added to the children's play area; extension to car park, provision of a new catering building offering an all year round service; lakeside improvements at the near end of Barden Lake and revetment work. It is worthy of note that the Haysden Country Park Volunteers

have worked exceptionally hard alongside the Council's Ranger team, contributing a significant amount of hours on projects in the Park.

1.2 Survey Results

- 1.2.1 A summary of satisfaction levels from the report are highlighted in sub-section 1.2.3 below. A full copy of the survey report can be made available to Members on request.
- 1.2.2 I am sure Members will be pleased to note the onsite casual user survey indicated that 99.5% of visitors were satisfied with the Park. This represents an increase of 2.5% since the last survey in 2013 and reflects the continuing high standards being achieved.
- 1.2.3 As well as general overall satisfaction, users were asked comment on a number of key site features and these are shown in the table below. Again satisfaction levels remain high for every aspect of the site, and the ratings for the refreshment facilities, safety and cleanliness are particularly pleasing to note.

Area of Satisfaction	2018 Result
Overall Satisfaction	99.5%
Attractiveness of the Park	99%
Refreshment Facilities	98%
Safety and security of site	97%
The children's play area	97%
Cleanliness of the Park	96%
The presence of wildlife	95%
Balance of recreation/wildlife	95%
The car park	93%
The Ranger Service	93%
Number of seats/benches	93%
Condition of the path surfaces	89%
Picnic tables	88%
Toilet facilities	88%
Signage in the Park	86%
Number of litter bins	82%
Facilities for people with disabilities	80%
Cleanliness in term of dog fouling	78%

- 1.2.4 The main reasons respondents gave for using the Park were to enjoy the countryside and watch the wildlife. Other high uses included: use of the children's play area; walking; walking the dog; or sitting and relaxing.
- 1.2.5 Whilst users travel from a wide catchment area, the majority live within fifteen minutes of the Park (74%). Only 8% of visitors travelled over 40 minutes. There was an increase in the number of people that walked to the Park 15% (2% in 2013). 80% of visitors travelled by car/minibus.

1.3 Potential Improvements

1.3.1 Users were also asked if they thought the Park should be improved in any way with 46% saying “No” and 54% saying “Yes”. This is a decrease in the number of visitors wanting improvements since 2013 (79% said yes) and again demonstrates the improvements made over the last 5 years. Those that replied yes were then asked what improvements they would like to see. The most frequent requests were: an undercover seating area for refreshments for the café; more for children to do and improved footpaths.

1.3.2 The comments below cover the three most frequent requests for improvement and also the areas with the lower satisfaction rates detailed at sub-section 1.2.3. When considering any improvements Members need to take account of the current high satisfaction levels.

- Undercover seating area – Whilst the overall satisfaction levels for refreshment facilities has significantly increased from 75% (2013) to 93.5%, visitors are now identifying a need for undercover seating. It has only been in the last two years that the catering unit has moved from a mobile facility to a permanently sited building opening all year. This has presented new challenges in the colder months and wet weather. At present the facility has outside picnic tables, some of which have large umbrellas for shelter and shade. It could be difficult to address this issue in the short-term though consideration could be given to a future redevelopment of the toilet/ranger building to incorporate a café facility. Such a significant project would be dependent on funding availability, potentially from developer contributions. It is proposed that the potential development of built facilities at Haysden Country Park be added to List C of the Council’s Capital Plan at its next review. Progress would be subject to the identification of funding.
- More for children to do – The satisfaction levels with the children’s play area have increased by 1% to 97% in this survey though it is acknowledged that the play area does have scope for further expansion. In terms of other provision for children the site also offers three self-guided trails and has seen a number of free events and some charged activities in recent years. It is proposed that Officers review the offer to children at the Park to identify any areas for improvement, whilst at the same time not changing the primary purpose of the facility.
- Condition of the paths/Facilities for People with disabilities – The satisfaction rating for facilities for the disabled was 80%, and given the specific comments received this appears to relate to the condition of the paths. Over the past years the Council has continued to invest in path improvements as this is an important aspect for visitors, it is proposed that an Access Audit be undertaken at the site with a key focus given to the condition of the paths.

- Number of litter bins – The provision of bins in the countryside is a debatable issue and there is a balance to be taken between making provision for visitors and the promotion of taking litter home. Taking into consideration the satisfaction rate recorded for the general cleanliness of the site (96%) it is felt that the Council has got this balance about right at the Park. In recent years bins have been reviewed and repositioned and this will continue as specific issues are identified.
- Cleanliness in relation to dog fouling – 78% of users were satisfied with this area which does leave some scope for improvement. Dog waste bins are provided within the site and enforcement is undertaken. It is proposed that additional focus be given to education, including Bag and Flag days and the introduction of the Keep Britain Tidy campaign in 2019.

1.4 Summary

1.4.1 The survey results highlight that Haysden Country Park continues to be well appreciated and highly valued by the local community. The Park has in recent years seen an increase in usage, and with this visitor expectations have also risen. Overall satisfaction levels are very high and the results clearly reflect the positive impact of investment made in the Park by the Council and volunteers, and it is important that the existing facilities continue to be well maintained in the future. A large number of positive comments were received and a selection are highlighted below:

- “It’s one of my children’s favourite places to go...”
- “I love the Park...”
- “...it’s a fantastic place that caters to many interests and age groups...”
- “A big thank you to the rangers and the volunteers who help maintain the Park”

1.5 Legal Implications

1.5.1 None.

1.6 Financial and Value for Money Considerations

1.6.1 Where possible, any actions to meet customer needs will be delivered through existing revenue budgets. Where additional funding is required this may be achievable through developer contributions, the Capital Plan or other external funding.

1.6.2 Included in List A of the Council’s Capital Plan is £75,000 to replace the existing sewage facility to meet demand and environmental requirements. This scheme, like many others at the Park, is funded in full by developer contributions.

1.7 Risk Assessment

1.7.1 Work based health and safety risk assessments and site inspections will continue to be undertaken. The strategic risks of these findings have been assessed as medium to low and relate to: service standards; strategic site management; financial investment; and responding to changing customer expectations. The Park is a Green Flag Award winning Park, and this also entitles a commitment to providing a good standard and continuous improvement.

1.8 Equality Impact Assessment

1.8.1 The decisions recommended through this paper have a remote or low relevance to the substance of the Equality Act, with no perceived impact on end users.

1.9 Policy Considerations

1.9.1 Asset Management, Customer Contact, Healthy Lifestyles and Community.

1.10 Recommendations

1.10.1 It is **RECOMMENDED TO CABINET** that:

- 1) the 2018 casual user market survey results for Haysden Country Park be noted; and
- 2) improvements be progressed in accordance with the approach outlined in the report and be included within the next Management Plan for the Park.

The Director of Street Scene, Leisure & Technical Services confirms that the proposals contained in the recommendation(s), if approved, will fall within the Council's Budget and Policy Framework.

Background papers:

contact: Chris Fox

Nil

Robert Styles

Director of Street Scene, Leisure & Technical Services