

Abney Park User Survey Report

Consultation Report

January 2018



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1. Aim of the consultation

The 2016/17 Abney Park User Survey was proposed with the following aim

“Hackney Council is applying for a Heritage Lottery Fund ‘Parks for People Grant’ to improve Abney Park. If successful, the grant will help to make Abney Park more accessible, safer and more sustainable as well as promote and protect its heritage, wildlife and diversity.

In order to increase the chances of a successful bid, the Council is seeking the views of park users and Hackney residents on what works well at Abney Park, what improvements could be made, and how to attract more visitors.”

2. Methodology

The consultation ran for 7 weeks from 10th December 2016 to 27th January 2017. The consultation launch was timed to coincide with the Abney Park Trust Winter Open Day (10th December) where paper copies of the survey were made available to visitors/

Participants could take part in two ways:

- online survey
- paper survey

Posters were displayed in the Park, Stoke Newington Town Hall, Stoke Newington Library and Hackney Archive. These posters contained contact details for residents who wanted more information about the consultation or needed help completing the survey.

The online survey was made available via the Council’s consultation hub ‘Citizen Space’. A link to the survey was also displayed on the Council’s website: www.hackney.gov.uk/abney-park and the Abney Park Trust website www.abneypark.org. The survey was also the subject of a mail-out to the Abney Park mailing list which contains 1953 subscribers.

Paper copies were made available at the Abney Park Visitor Centre, Stoke Newington Town Hall, Stoke Newington Library and Hackney Archive. Paper copies were also handed out at the Abney Park Trust Winter Open Day (10th December)

3. Events

The consultation coincided with the Abney Park Trust Winter Open Day





(10th December) and paper copies were made available on the Abney Park Trust stall at the front of the open day.



4. Data inputting and analysis

Completed paper copies of the consultation were sent to Tom Simpson who inputted them manually into Citizen Space for analysis. The statistical data and qualitative comments was then analysed on Citizen Space by Tom Simpson

Note on the data quality and interpretation:

The survey contained several opportunities for respondents to write their thoughts in an open manner (i.e. not using tick boxes or pre-described options). In analysing this data, all of the comments and different themes contained within them were 'tagged' or grouped under common themes. The report does not address every single comment, however all comments are available for view.

Not all participants chose to give comments in the survey, meaning some questions contained more qualitative data than others. Where comments have been highlighted in this report, it is because the frequency of the comment or theme mentioned was high (relative to other comments and themes for that given question).

It is important to note that comments were not offered by all participants throughout this survey, so it is important to treat summaries of qualitative comments with caution as they may not be representative of the wider population.

5. Who took part?

A total of 409 people took part in the consultation. Of these respondents, over 97% (398) had visited Abney Park at least once. The survey was placed in locations other than Abney Park in order to attract respondents who had never visited the site and explore the reasons behind people not visiting Abney Park. However, it is perhaps unsurprising that those that did not know about, or had no interest in visit Abney Park would not take the time to fill out an Abney Park user survey. Only 11 people who had never visited before chose to take part in the survey. Although the number of respondents who had never visited the park was so small it is difficult to draw any meaningful conclusions from their responses, they are included in the report as their responses are still interesting.





6. Summary of key findings

The findings from this survey suggest that Abney Park is a well-loved local park, used for variety of amenities. Park users like Abney Park's mix of natural and historic heritage, due to the fact that it is both a nature reserve and a former cemetery and there was significant mention of the 'atmosphere' of Abney Park. There is a fear that too much investment in the Park may cause it to lose its atmosphere but there is appetite for more activity on site, specifically more information and events about Abney Park itself. There is also a significant perception that the Park is un-safe and has problems with anti-social behaviour.

Park satisfaction and safety

- 79.5% (325) of respondents were satisfied or very satisfied with the Park overall
- 90.0% (366) of respondents said they were likely, or very likely to recommend it to others.
- 26.7% (109) of respondents said they felt unsafe in Abney Park.

Abney in the future

- 48.4% (198) did not want to see any new facilities in the Park
- 76.0% (311) of respondents wanted to see more events and activities in the park

Other ideas and comments:

The survey did not successfully reach those who have never visited the Abney Park. In order to attract new visitors it will be crucial to explore the barriers preventing people from visiting and this may require proactively targeting groups that did not take part in this survey and are, in all probability, not using Abney Park.

- 97.3% (398) of respondents had visited Abney Park before

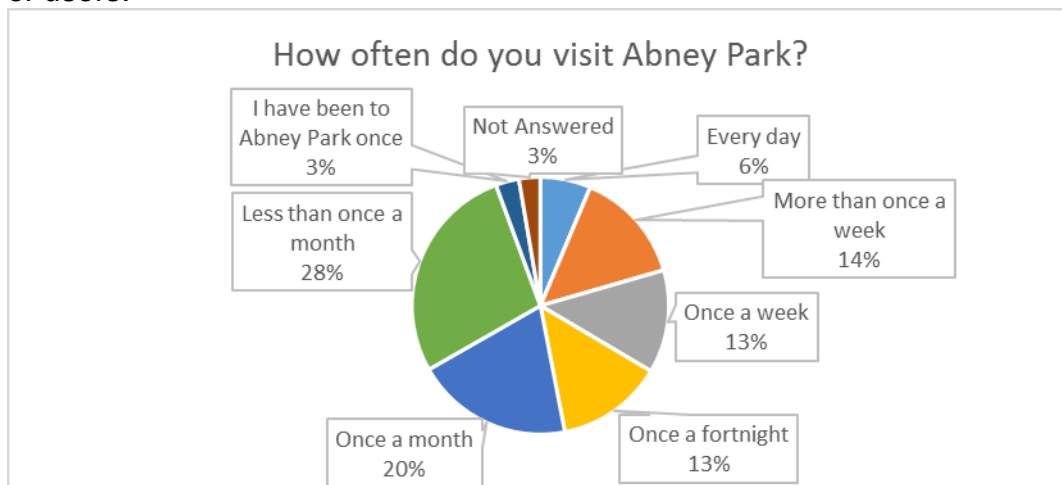
Furthermore, those that took part in the survey were not representative of the borough as a whole.



- 84.11% (344) of the respondents identified as White or White British, compared to 54.7% identifying as White or White British in the 2018 survey 'A Profile of Hackney, its People and Place'

7. How Abney is used

In terms of how often respondents visited Abney Park there was a fairly even spread across the options for frequency of visit which suggests that the survey reached a wide variety of users.



graph 1

Respondents were encourage to tick all options that applied to them in answer to “What Are Your Principal Reasons for Visiting Abney Park?” with the following results.

Go for a walk	298	72.86%
Nature and wildlife	242	59.17%
Explore the cemetery’s history	174	42.54%
Cut through the park	152	37.16%
Walk the dog	67	16.38%
Visit a grave	35	8.56%
Not Answered	30	7.34%

More than 70% of the respondents ticked more than one option in response to this question which suggest Abney Park is used and appreciated in a number of different ways. This was emphasised in the responses to questions later in the survey on what people like about the site.

Of the reasons offered by respondents not provided by the survey, 'Plays and Theatre' was the next most popular reason for visiting the Park with 3% (13) of respondents citing this as a principal reason they visited the Park.

Over half the respondents had attended an event or activity in Abney Park which, given that this was not a common principal reason for visit the Park, suggests that events and activities are popular with current park users.

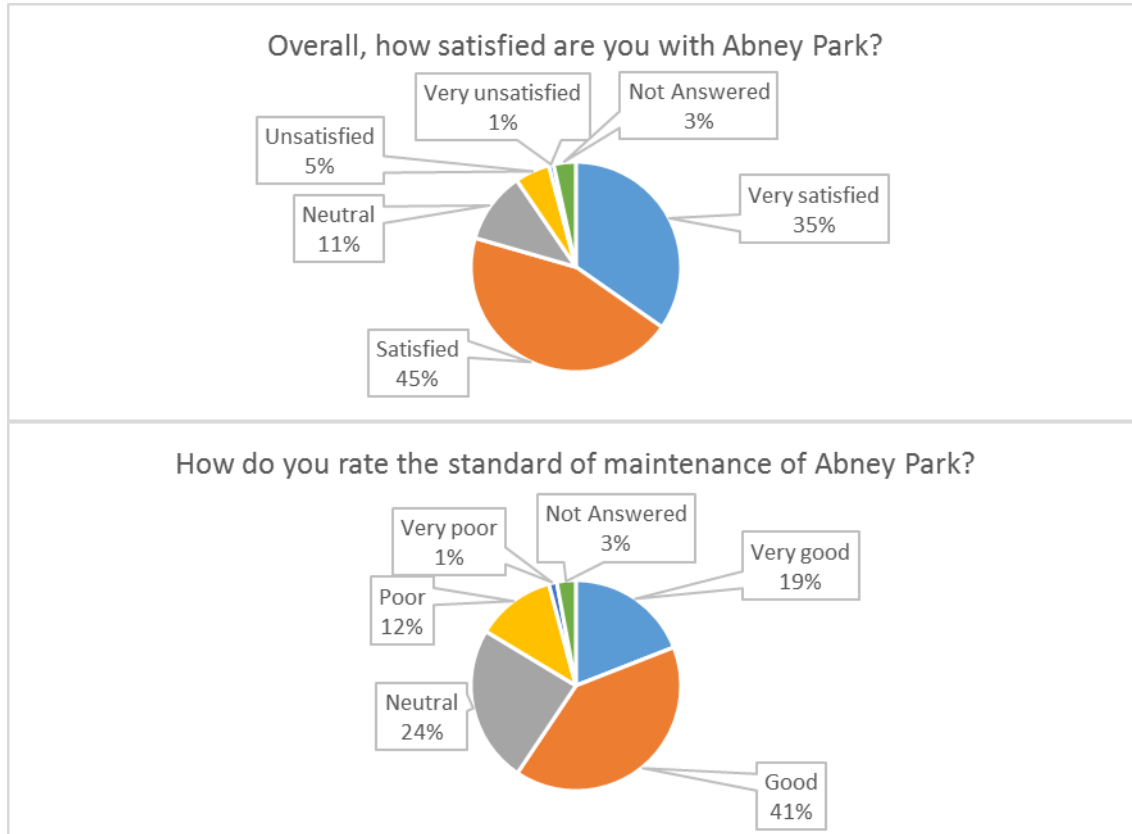
87% (356) of respondents felt that the current park opening times suited their needs. Those that felt the opening times did not meet their needs mostly wanted the park to be open for longer later in the day.

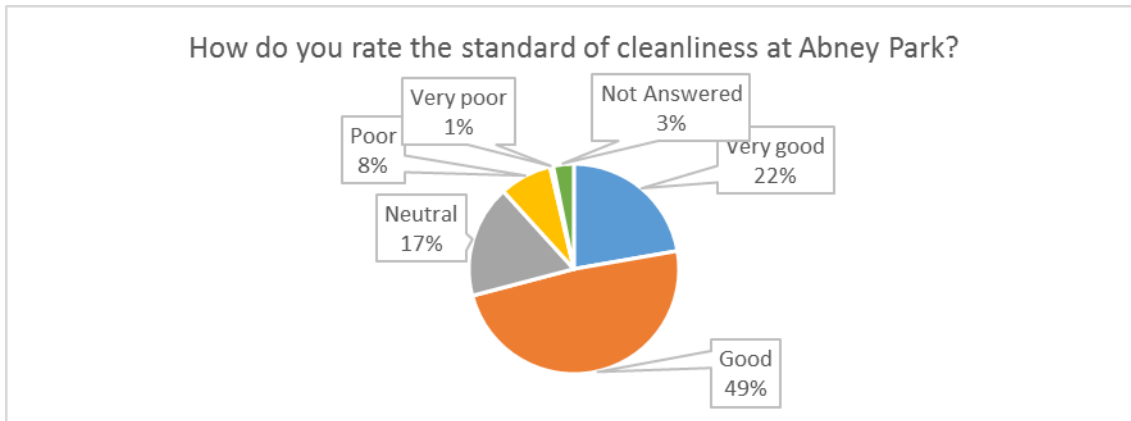


8. Park Satisfaction

Respondents were mostly happy with Abney Park with 79.5% (325) satisfied or very satisfied with the Park overall. 90% (366) of respondents said they were likely, or very likely to recommend the park

When asked about the cleanliness and level of maintenance at the park the number who rated this as good or very good was lower; 70.7% (290) regarding cleanliness and 59.4% (243) regarding maintenance.





graph 2

Reasons for this lower level of satisfaction (especially regarding the maintenance) are explored later in this report but can be summarised as some people (typically who like the wild nature of Abney Park) feeling there is too much maintenance...

'the bits that are cut to pieces and all mown down...destroys the habitat of a nature reserve'

I like the wilderness, natural plant and wild life being left without being interfered with.

Whereas Clissold Park is manicured, I like Abney Park to be left unkempt and wild, so long as the pedestrian paths are kept free. I like the tumbledown gravestones that are benign yet aesthetically beautiful.

...while others (typically those interested in the built heritage of Abney or those visiting graves) feel not enough maintenance is carried out.

'Some headstones are falling over and overgrown which seems a shame'

'It is very overgrown and neglected.'

However, when given the opportunity to leave any further comments at the end of the survey 19% gave unprompted positive feedback about the management of the Park.

'Keep this wonderful mix of managed wildness! Thank you!'

Respondents were given the opportunity to write, in their own words, what they liked and disliked about Abney Park. In analysing this data, all of the comments and different themes contained within them were 'tagged' or grouped under common themes. As with principal reasons for visiting Abney Park, respondents listed multiple



different aspects they liked

about Abney.

'The atmosphere, history and nature. It's a great place to explore and my little niece loves it when she comes down to visit. It changes every time you visit, with new seasons, kinds of weather and times of day. The history is fascinating and wildlife very varied.'

'Heritage, culture, nature in one place within an urban setting.'

Below the most common themes are listed

Nature	251	61.37%
Built Heritage	185	45.23%
Peaceful	133	32.52%
Wildness	125	30.56%
Atmosphere	103	25.18%
Secluded	83	20.29%

The fact that some many respondents mentioned more than one factor when listing what they like about the Park and that these factors are not necessarily linked, suggests that Abney's a mix of built and natural heritage is an asset.

Conversely, when asked what they didn't like about Abney Park, respondents were much more specific with 4 key themes, all to do with anti-social behaviour, cropping up multiple times. It should be noted that a significant proportion of respondents (34.5% - 141 respondents) chose not to respond to this question.

'The litter - there are a lot of glass bottles / cans around from drinkers. I dislike people drinking alcohol on the benches in the park. I have found used condoms in the bushes.'

'Men loitering / cruising. Can feel a little intimidating. Ditto the drinkers at the top end of the cemetery.'

What do you dislike about Abney Park?

Drinkers	79	19.32%
Litter	59	14.43%
Lone men / cruisers	65	15.89%
Concerns about safety	56	13.69%
Not Answered	141	34.47%

Concerns about safety were covered in their own right later in the survey with the following results

Do You Feel Safe in Abney Park?

Yes	276	67.48%
No	109	26.65%
Not Answered	24	5.87%

It should be noted that there were several comments made by those who had ticked the option of yes in response to the above question, that show that even though the respondent felt safe themselves in Abney Park, nevertheless saw safety in the Park as an issue.

Yes (I feel safe) with other people. Haven't walked around Abney Park alone recently, so unsure whether that would feel safe.

Yes (I feel safe) if with others. As a woman, I wouldn't go there alone.'

'It's generally fine but my partner doesn't feel safe and I wouldn't be that happy about her walking through the park alone in the dark. The general litter/condoms/cans and bottles etc. don't leave the park feeling safe.'

Respondents were asked to explain their answer to the above question with three main themes reoccurring.

Do You Feel Safe in Abney Park?

Please explain your answer...

Don't like coming in on their own	47	11.49%
Lone men	44	10.76%
Drunks	37	9.05%

9. Abney in the future

The survey contained several questions on what changes / improvements park users would like to see in the future. When asked if they would like to see any new facilities in the park slightly more people (48.4%) said they didn't want to see any new facilities compared to those that did want to see new facilities (44%). The quotes below give an overview for the reasoning behind this

'I see it as a cemetery and nature reserve and those things don't require more facilities in my opinion'

'Plenty of facilities nearby, park facilities such as coffee shops tend to be poor quality'



*'I like the wildness of the park.
Additional facilities would spoil that aspect'*

'the park works as it is, does every park need to become a creche/cafe?'

Those that did want to see new facilities mostly mentioned toilets and a café.

A much greater proportion (76%) of respondents wanted to see more events and activities in the park – in particular events about the site itself and more of the kind of events that already take place suggesting there is a high level of satisfaction with the current events programme and an appetite for more.

10. Those that had never visited Abney Park

As mentioned above, only a very few respondents had not visited the park – 11 in total. They gave the following reason behind never having visited (respondents could select multiple options).

Didn't know about the park	6
Didn't know it was open to the public	4
Nervous about getting lost	3
Don't feel safe	3

These 11 respondents proposed the following as factors that would make them more likely to visit in the future.

- Better access for pushchairs
- Safer
- More information in local papers
- No drunks
- More advertising



11. Conclusion

Abney Park is used in a wide range of ways and those that like the Park cite this diversity and mix of built and natural heritage as a key factor behind their enjoyment of the space. Unsurprisingly, amongst those who currently enjoy the Park there is a reluctance to see too much interference with this balance of built and natural and there is a fear that the 'unique magic' of Abney will be lost if too much is changed or added.

'I hope you don't spoil it by doing too much to it. Make it safe and accessible but let nature take its course.'

'I am very worried about these proposed improvements. The beauty of Abney Park is that it is unkept and chaotic. I fear that these 'improvements' will ruin the beauty of the place which comes from the wild vegetation and decaying monuments. This is what makes Abney Park truly unique.'

Those that feel less positively about Abney Park have widely varying and sometimes diametrically opposing reasons behind these feelings. This is exemplified by issues over management and maintenance where some feel there is too much maintenance and others not enough. Interestingly, these feelings are often wrapped up in people's feelings about what Abney Park actually is. In general, those who feel there is not enough maintenance refer to Abney Park as a cemetery while those who feel there is too much interference refer to it as a nature reserve.

This is summed up in the following comments

'Is it a park or a cemetery? These are conflicting uses and will influence how you respond. The fact that the Council is referring to this as a park infers that its original purpose as a cemetery may not seem as important. There are important historical figures buried there and most importantly a war memorial is hidden away. These are important to Stoke Newington and its history. It provides an important wild life habitat so a challenge to find a solution that acknowledges these different uses.'

'It is a nature reserve and should be left overgrown'

Regardless of the capacity in which they visit, a large majority of Park users share common ground over wanting to know more about Abney Park and wanting to see more activity on site. Similarly many park users have issues surrounding anti-social behaviour. In particular drinking and cruising are an issue for Abney Park and are having an impact on both current park users and those that do not currently use the Park.



Neighbourhoods and Housing
 Hackney Council
 Hackney Service Centre
 1 Hillman Street
 London E8 1DY

Mrs Alison Richmond
 Via Email
 (arichmond@icon.org.uk)

020 8356 3810
 E-Mail: Ian.Holland@hackney.gov.uk

Our Ref: FOI18-0205-14556

19th January 2018

Dear Mrs. Richmond,

Re: Your Freedom of Information Request

Thank you for your recent correspondence in which you requested the following information:

1. **Copies of any official documentation detailing which professions and trades are permitted to undertake any of these: maintenance, repairs, conservation and restoration of monuments in Abney Park Cemetery.**
2. **Copies of any official documentation detailing how practitioners undertaking the maintenance, repairs, conservation or restoration of monuments in Abney Park Cemetery are selected and what criteria are used for selecting them.**
3. **Copies of any official documentation describing how the quality of the maintenance, repairs, conservation and restoration of monuments in Abney Park Cemetery is assessed, and by whom.**
4. **Copies of any official documentation detailing whether the policy for the maintenance, repairs, conservation or restoration of monuments in Abney Park Cemetery is different for designated monuments than for non-designated monuments.**

Your request has been considered and the answers to your questions are outlined below.

We do not have any official documentation relating to the above. No professions or trades are allowed to work in Abney Park without permission from the Council.

When engaged in any of the activities mentioned and when



working with companies
that provide the services you describe; we liaise with representatives from Historic England to ensure good practice.

Any proposed work to listed monuments would also require a method statement which would be checked by Historic England and would require listed building consent.

Please note the information contained in this response is still covered by copyright legislation. You are not authorised to re-use this information for commercial or research purposes as defined by the Re-Use of Public Sector Information Regulations 2005. If you do wish to re-use this information please contact the Information Governance Team, 3rd Floor, Maurice Bishop House, Reading Lane, London, E8 1HH.

If you are dissatisfied with this response and wish to appeal, please write to the Information Governance Team, Appeals, 3rd Floor Maurice Bishop House Reading Lane London E8 1HH and your complaint will be dealt with through our Internal Review procedure.

If you are still not satisfied following the Internal Review, you have a right to appeal to the Information Commissioner. He can be contacted at:

Information Commissioner's Office
Wycliffe House
Water Lane
Wilmslow
Cheshire SK9 5AF

Telephone: 01625 545 700

www.ico.gov.uk

Yours sincerely