

FPA Consultation Stalls Report



Neil Smith, October 2020

v1 –



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INTRODUCTION

This draft report presents the analysis of the data collected through consultations stalls in the three FPA parks: Waterman's Park, the Winton Recreation Ground and Alexandra Park. The consultation stalls were held on Friday 24th and Saturday 25th September 2021.

There were two main aims for the consultation stalls:

1. To revisit the findings of the online surveys conducted in summer 2020 and see what changes, if any, there were in the feedback from park users.
2. To gauge the extent to which park users have observed and liked the changes made in the last 12 months through the FPA initiative.

The timing of the consultation stalls was scheduled to account for the 'first summer' growing cycle e.g., for wildflowers and changed mowing regimes, and for other changes such as community gardens and early changes to the layout of the parks. The hope was that park users would have had time to notice and to have formed opinions on these and other changes.

METHOD

The consultation method used questions printed on paper and attached to pinboards. The questions were pre-populated with the most common answers provided in the summer 2020 online survey. Park users were encouraged to consider the questions and place pins to indicate their preferred answers. The process is quick and efficient, allowing the facilitator to engage in conversation with the park users as they go through the questions, making notes on the more significant comments.

The questions asked covered the following areas:

1. Age and sex.
2. Pattern of usage: frequency, timing, and duration.
3. What people use the park for?
4. Likes and barriers to using the parks more frequently / for more time.
5. How people would like the next generation to experience the parks.
6. People's opinions on the FPA improvements.

We did not revisit the following questions from the first survey:

1. How people get to the parks and how long it takes them to get there – we did not anticipate any significant changes to this information.
2. Whether there are any other facilities people would like to see, or activities that they would like, and people's top three suggested improvements – the FPA project is acting on what is already known.
3. Any other services people would like to see? As for item two, this is being addressed through the FPA project.



Consultation stall at Alexandra Park, opposite the playground

As for the summer 2020 survey, the results produced quantitative and qualitative data. The question format allowed for comparison with the summer 2020 data, summarised in graphs. There was far less qualitative material than in the summer 2020 survey, reflecting the lower number of people engaged and the design of the consultation stalls. Results from the three separate surveys are consolidated to provide an overall 'picture' of responses across the parks, and then presented for each park.

Please bear in mind that the analysis is of the responses made and does not necessarily reflect the views of the majority of park and green space users, only the views of those who responded, but the surveys do provide a useful indication. Typically, there were around 90 responses separately recorded on the consultation questions, but as some responses were by one person responding for a couple, or for a group of children, the total number of people engaged is at least 100. People did not always answer all the questions.

The questions on the FPA improvements gathered the most responses with 125 responses, so this may show the total number of people engaged through the stalls. This compares to responses from c400 people for the summer 2020 survey. Overall, the sample size is valid, but the sample size for Watermans Park was small (due to poor weather on the Saturday morning) and the responses should therefore be treated with caution.

It should also be remembered that Alexandra Park was surveyed in a different way in 2020 and therefore does not have data for many of the questions, making some comparisons difficult.

SUMMARY

OVERVIEW AND HOW PEOPLE WOULD LIKE THE NEXT GENERATION TO EXPERIENCE THE PARKS

The consultation stalls in September 2021 gathered a broad range of responses from a good range of people. The responses were largely positive, and the park users have a strong attachment to the parks e.g., having used the parks since they were children, now taking their children or grandchildren to use the same spaces. People retain a strong connection to the parks as spaces in which to exercise, meet other people and to make memories with family and friends.

The consultation stalls respondents' vision for the parks remains one of safe, clean, beautiful, relaxing places for family, friends, and the community, but with more emphasis on the parks being safe and clean, well maintained, and better for dogs. Ratings for the parks being 'welcoming, beautiful calm spaces' and similar attributes were nearly half what they were in the 2020 survey, but these are still the most popular responses, and more so for Watermans and Winton.

The changes in the parks which come from the FPA project have been noticed and well received; people are particularly keen on the planned changes. Our feeling is that the changes being made will further reinforce the place of the parks in people's lives, demonstrating that the council understands the importance of continuing to invest in these spaces to create a range of public goods: healthier, happier, more active, and socially connected people; spaces which also work better for nature; and spaces which demonstrate important community values of sharing and respect. There are some challenges, notably from a small minority whose behaviour is found distasteful to the majority, but there are far more positives than negatives on which to build.

There is a strongly positive overall reaction to the changes brought about by the FPA project and a sense that momentum is being built. Our experience is that people need time to adjust to change, even when we might think those changes are positive and good! Persistence and consistency are key to achieving better long-term outcomes, and so the FPA project needs to think now about legacy and sustainability. The recently secured project extension will be helpful in this regard.

PATTERN OF USAGE: FREQUENCY, TIMING, AND DURATION

The respondents in September 2020 were nearly five times as likely to visit the park every day, compared to the 2020 online survey respondents, and more likely also to use the park one, two or three times a week. The people spoken to grew up mostly in the local area, but a significant minority have moved to the area from other parts of the UK and the world – this was more evident at Winton than elsewhere. This minority group had a stronger appreciation of the parks, thinking them 'amazing' and 'fantastic' for the quality of the space and facilities. Local people tended to be more critical, and more likely to recount a negative story from the past, especially the older users.

In 2020, 57% of the survey respondents made park visits which lasted up to 1 hour with most people spending from 30 minutes to an hour at one of the parks. The proportion of visits by those surveyed in 2021 which lasted up to an hour was 63%, at the expense of staying longer (33% in 2020 vs 19% in 2021). However, there was a higher proportion using the parks for more than two hours (10% in 2020 vs 14% in 2021). This more evident at Winton, with Alexandra Park having the shortest duration of park visits (perhaps relating to its smaller size?).

In 2020, survey respondents were more likely to visit the parks at the weekend and in the daytime, but those surveyed in 2021 were nearly half as likely to visit the park at the weekend, more likely to use the parks during the day and all year round. One in five visitors to Watermans Park apparently do so in the evening, more than three times the proportion who use Winton in the evening, with apparently no-one using Alexandra Park in the evening. Based on observations and conversations, walking remains the most usual way for people to get to the parks, with travelling by car the second most likely method.

WHAT PEOPLE USE THE PARK FOR?

Children's play was reportedly the most popular reason for using the parks in 2020 (24% of park users), followed by walking (18%) and exercise (13%), depending on what the parks have on offer. In 2021, the responses broke down differently: children's play was down to 7%, walking down to 12% with exercise about the same (13% in 2020 vs 12% in 2021).

Dog walking features more strongly in 2021, with 25% of park users reporting this as the reason for their park visit, compared to 11% in 2020. Less prominent changes are for socialising, which features more strongly (10% in 2020 vs 13% in 2021), skating is up from 1% to 5%, and using the café is up from 7% to 10%.

In practice, park users in 2021 were observed doing several activities: dog-walking provides an opportunity for exercise and walking, and for socialising at the café, or in the park space more generally (at Watermans). Children's play provides a chance for adults to socialise (especially at Alexandra Park where people would like the chance of a coffee).

All this activity happens in an environment in which people notice the good and the not so good aspects of the park. They appreciate the utility and the beauty of the spaces – after all, the same activities could happen in a warehouse, but our views on whether that would be enjoyable would be rather different from doing those activities in attractive and welcoming outdoor spaces.

LIKES AND BARRIERS TO USING THE PARKS MORE FREQUENTLY / FOR MORE TIME

In 2020, one in three people appreciated the open spaces and layout of the parks more than any other attribute, but this attribute was selected by less than half that proportion of people in 2021, with more people saying that the parks were good for dogs and for the children to enjoy. The café at Winton was liked by 15% of respondents, but no-one selected the café at Alexandra Park. In that case, people liked that there is a café there, but were critical of the erratic opening hours.

People continue to like the localness and community-feel of the parks, especially at Alexandra Park. What people continue to appreciate in the parks is largely defined by what is available there, such as the popularity of the café at Winton, and the play area and trees at Alexandra Park.

The abuse of drink and drugs remains off-putting for a significant proportion for users of all the parks, with an increased proportion of respondents noting this (19% in 2020 vs 26% in 2021). Dealing in and using drugs was clear at Winton Recreation Ground, at times making it hard for people to use the toilets. There was some drinking activity at Alexandra Park which people reported as off-putting, but this was less visible than at Winton. Evident at both Winton and Alexandra was

that people engaging in drink and drug activity do not want to be noticed; showing them that they had been noticed encouraged them to leave. The drinking problems at Watermans seem to be confined to the skating area and later at night, with people leaving bottles around.

Litter and graffiti also rate more highly, noted by 11% of respondents, compared to 4/5% of respondents in 2020, as well as the absence of toilets (at Alexandra Park). However, the proportion of people reporting that they think the parks are rundown and unsafe fell by more than two-thirds from 10% to 3%.

DEMOGRAPHICS

The people surveyed in 2021 were generally from a younger profile than the online survey of 2020, with more than a quarter aged 15 or under, and 38% aged 24 or under. In 2020, 52% of respondents were aged 25 to 44, but in 2021 this proportion was much lower at 20%, balanced by having a higher proportion of middle-aged and older people than in 2020 – people aged 45 to 65+ accounted for 32% of respondents in 2020, but for 42% of respondents in 2021. This age distribution is referred to in consultation circles as the ‘missing middle’ – people of working age who are harder to engage in consultation exercises, and who might be easier to reach through online consultations. The gender distribution was 50/50 female/male.

PEOPLE’S OPINIONS ON THE FPA IMPROVEMENTS.

The changes made to the parks in 2020/21 through the FPA project have been noticed and liked by most people. They are keen on the planned changes for 2021/22. Some dog owners are less keen on the long grass due to problems with grass seeds, but for the most part this was the only complaint relating to the renaturing / changed mowing regime and other measures to make the parks better for nature and for people.

People were less aware of the ‘community garden: raised beds and potting bench’ at Winton than any other FPA initiative; perhaps this needs some publicity to raise awareness. The new benches at Alexandra Park had also gone unnoticed by some, but this may be because the question was posed ahead of installation.

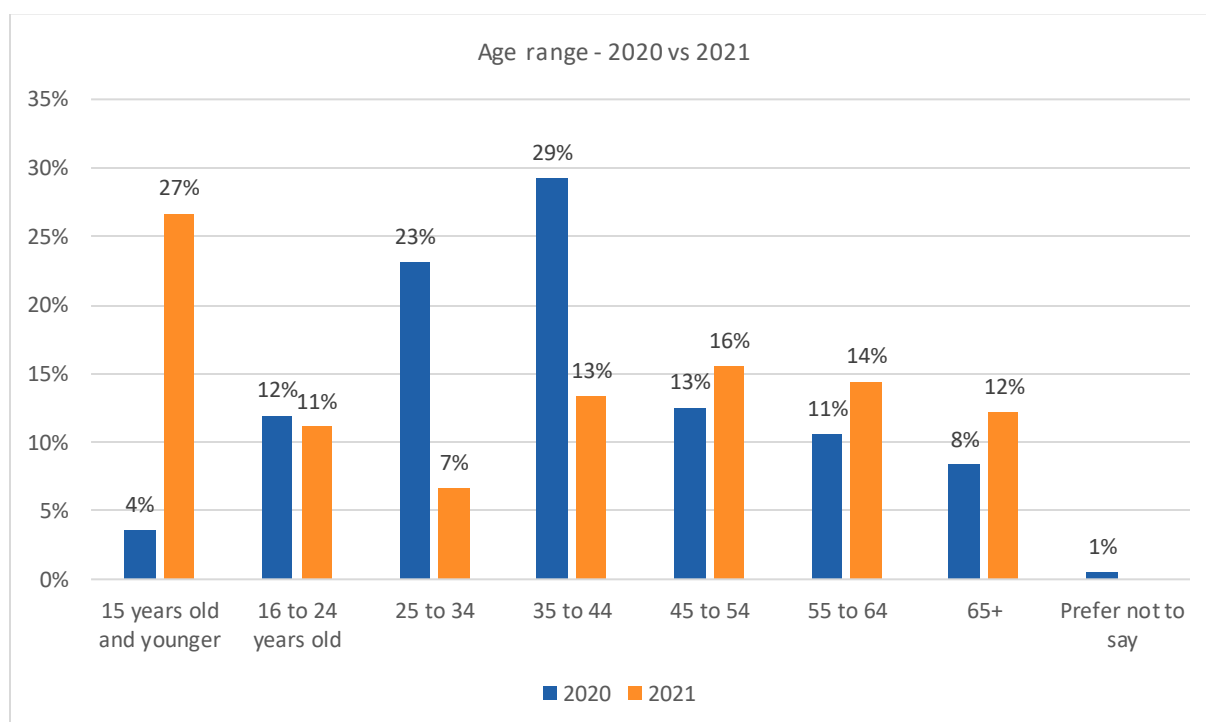
ANALYSIS OF THE CONSULTATION STALL SURVEYS

The analysis brings together the responses from the consultation stalls held in the three parks. As has already been mentioned, the sample size for Watermans Park is significantly smaller than for Alexandra Park and Winton Recreation Ground and so the results from there should be viewed with caution.

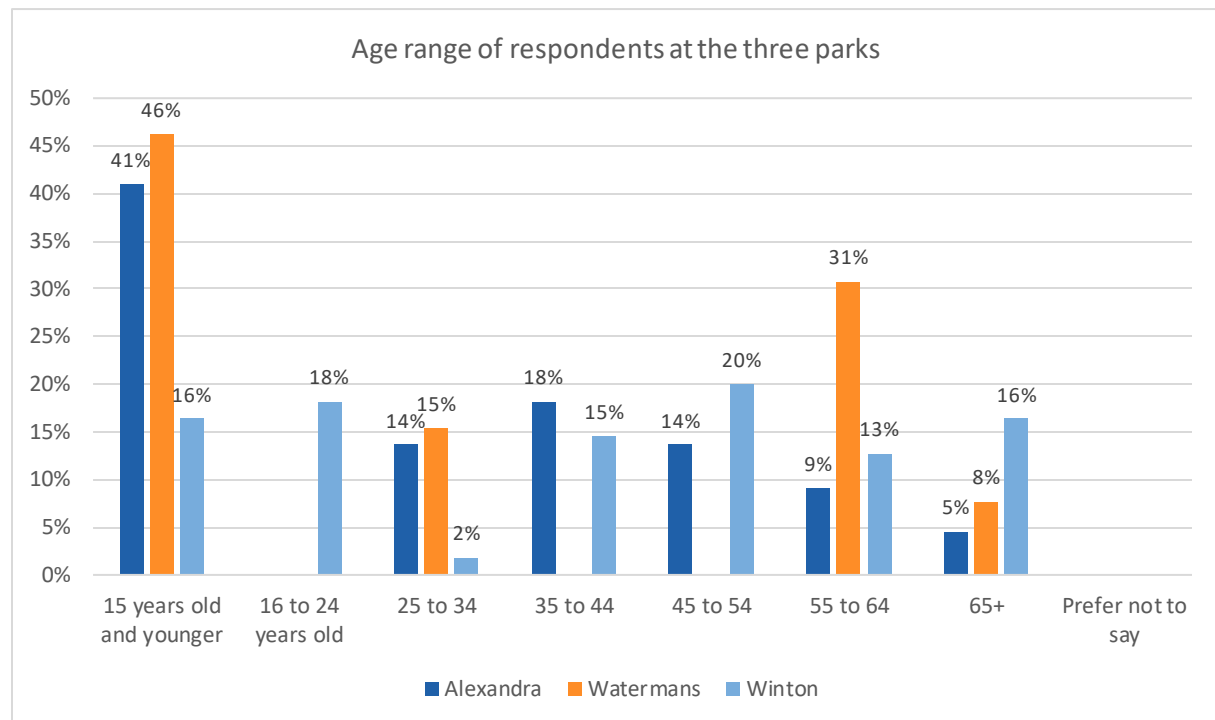
AGE RANGE OF RESPONDENTS – ALEXANDRA, WATERMANS AND WINTON PARKS

The following graph shows the percentage distribution of respondents to the surveys. Most responses were from people aged 25 to 44 (52% in all) in 2020, whereas most responses were from people aged 24 and younger in 2021 (38%). This is thought to be because meeting people face to face enabled more young people and children to engage with the survey work. More older people were also engaged, but far fewer people aged 25 to 44 (20% in 2021 vs 52% in 2020). Other than the stalls running on a workday for one of the days, it is unclear why this is so; we would expect to see this demographic on the weekend.

It was good to reach more young people and children through the consultation stalls, compared to the online survey. Their views did not differ much from the older age groups, apart from not mentioning or being aware of the drug and drink problems.

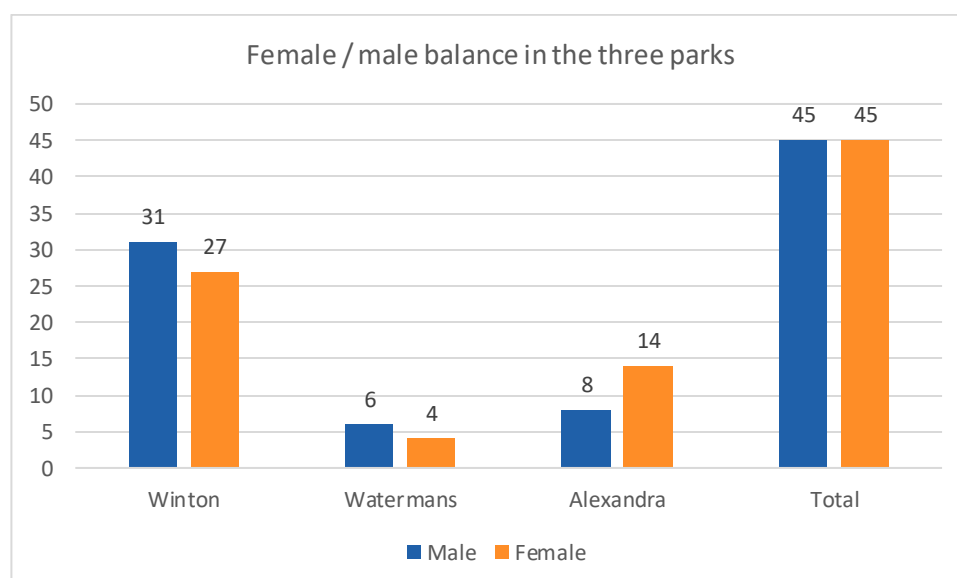


There were significant differences in the age distribution of the respondents for the three parks with Watermans having a high proportion of younger respondents (as in 2020), but from a small sample size. Winton has again a larger proportion of respondents aged 65 or over. A good proportion of respondents were younger people at Alexandra Park reflecting the location of the consultation stall opposite to the play area.



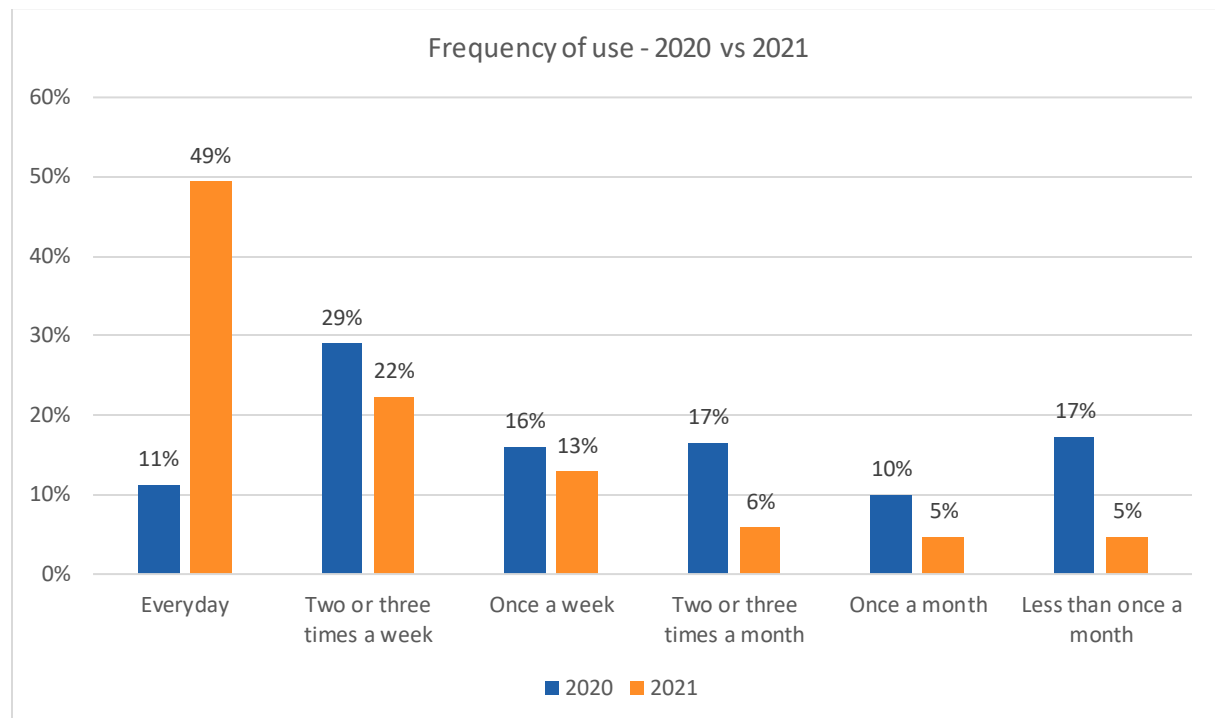
FEMALE / MALE RANGE OF RESPONDENTS IN THE THREE PARKS

The following graph shows the spread of female and male respondents in the three parks with a 50/50 balance overall. Watermans Park again shows the smaller sample size. Not everyone answered this question.

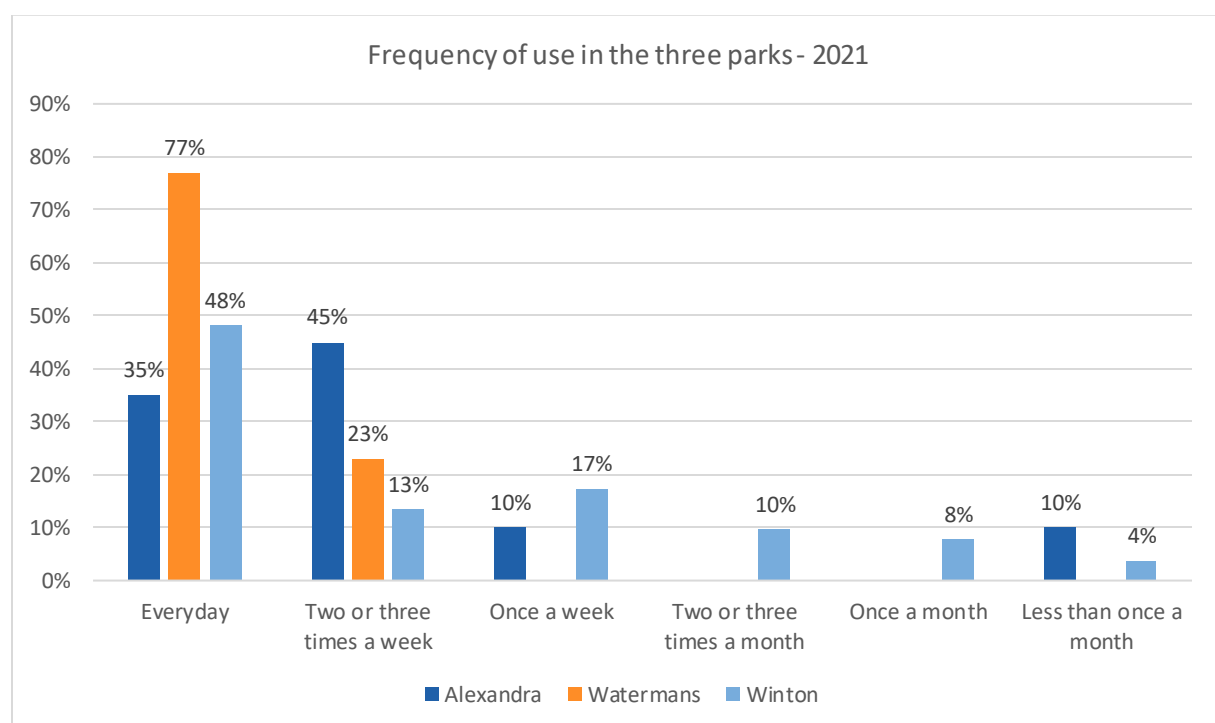


HOW OFTEN PEOPLE VISIT THE PARKS

The following graph shows the percentage distribution for how often respondents use the parks. Nearly five times the proportion use the parks every day, compared to the respondents in 2020.

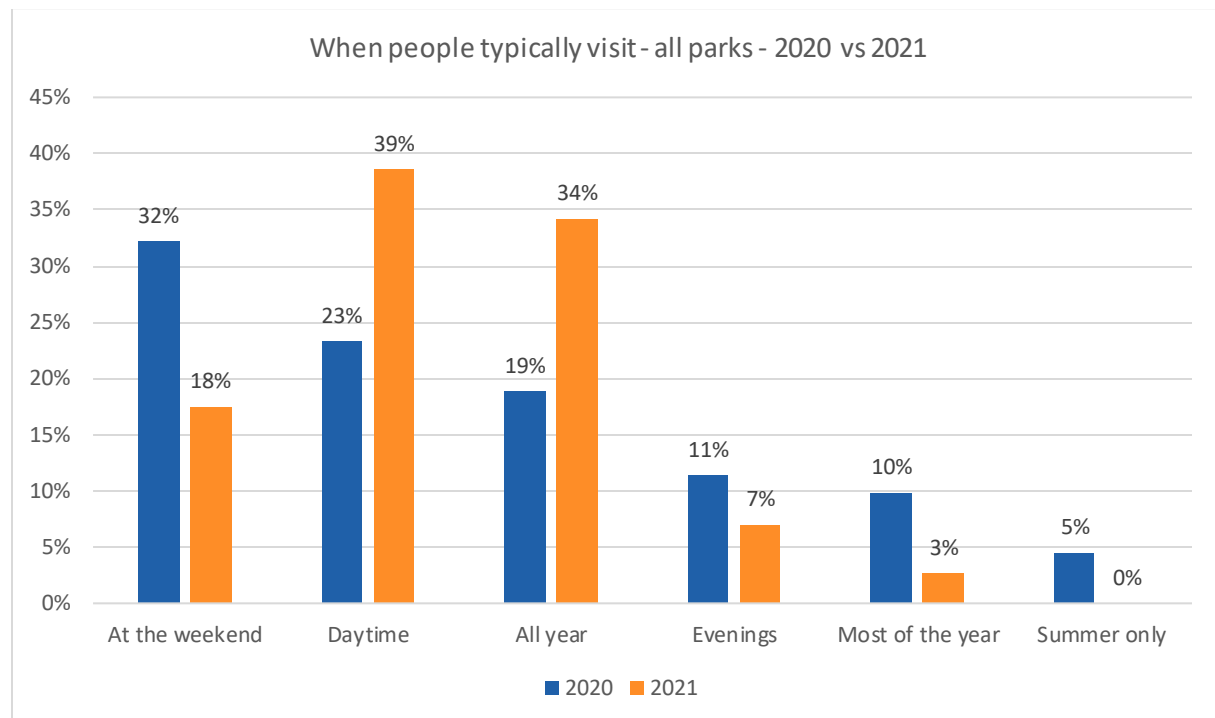


The following graph shows the variation between the different parks with Watermans showing the highest proportion of 'everyday' users. Most of the respondents in 2021 use the parks every day or two to three times a week, accounting for 40% of all visits.

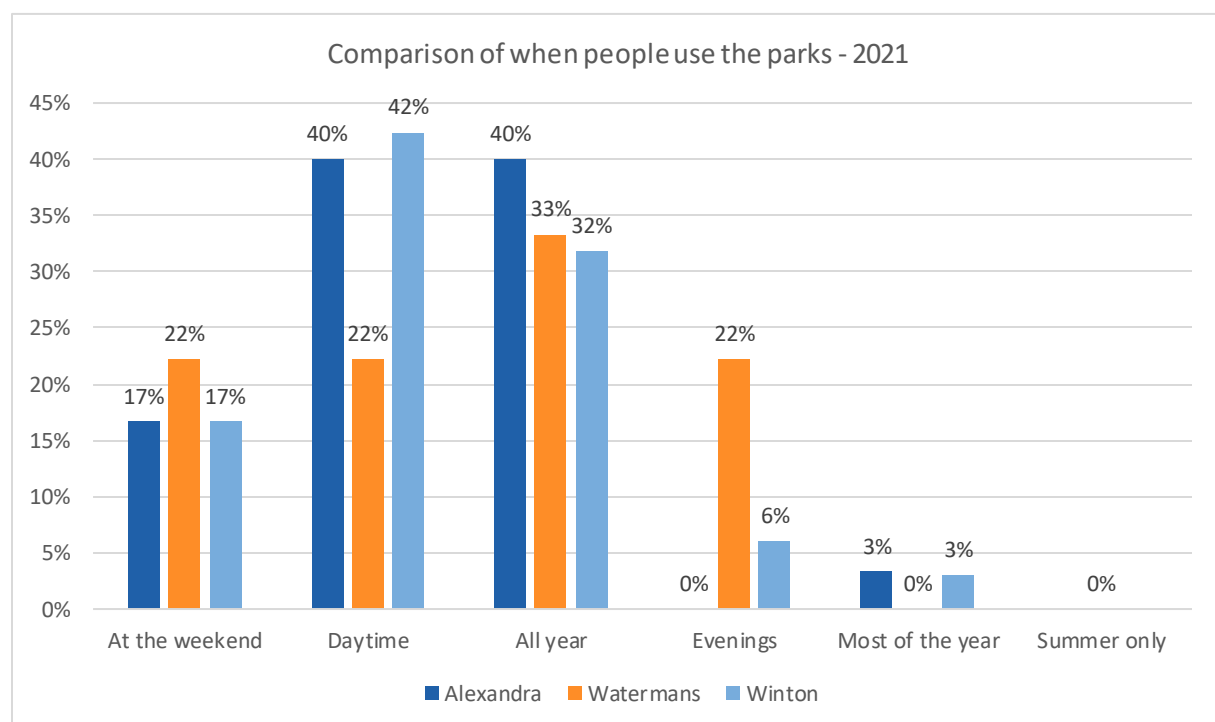


WHEN PEOPLE VISIT THE PARKS

The following graph shows the percentage distribution for when people visit the parks, compared to the respondents in 2020. Again, the pattern of usage is noticeably different to the pattern based on the 2020 survey. There is a lower proportion of people using the park at the weekend (even though one day of the stalls were held on a Saturday), but a higher proportion using the parks in daytime.

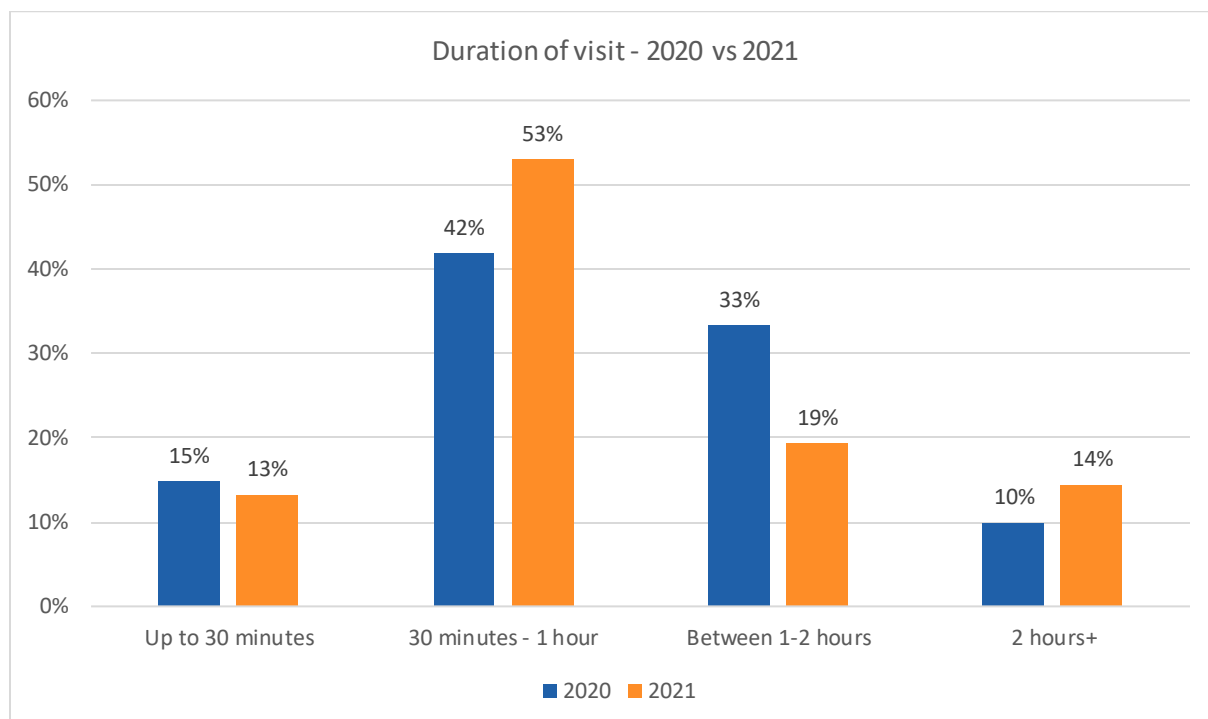


The outstanding result in the graph below is the proportion of people using Watermans Park in the evening, albeit from a small sample. The results for the other times are all consistent.

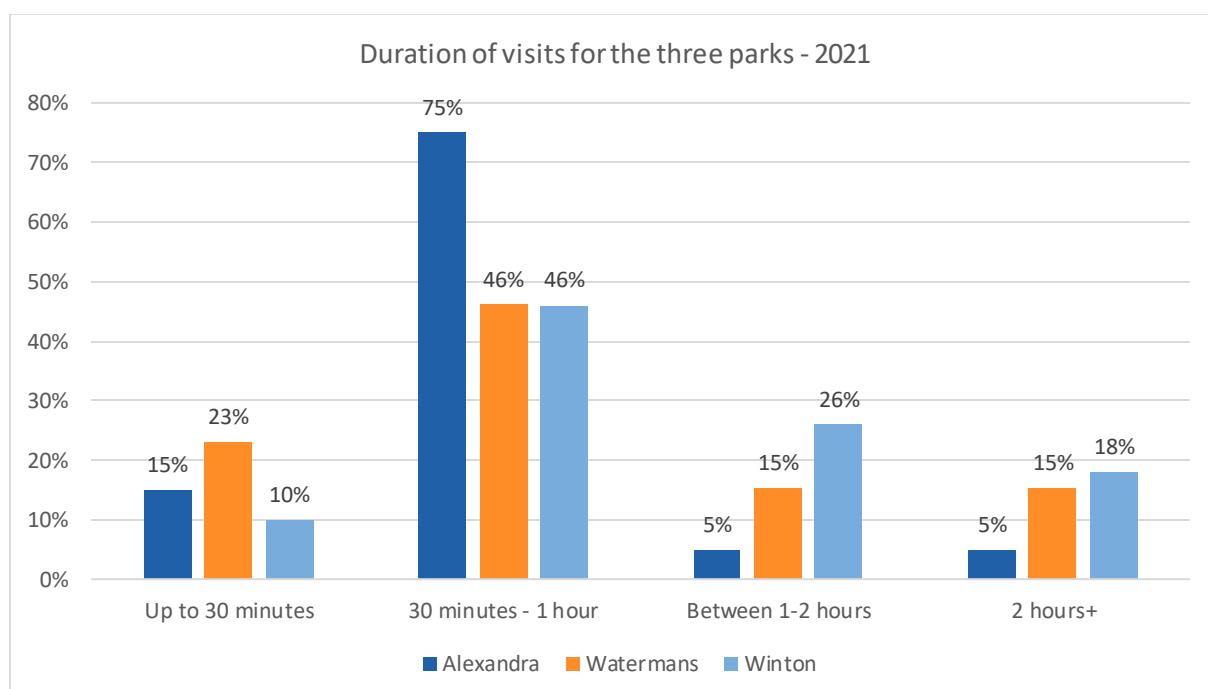


DURATION OF VISITS TO THE PARKS

In 2020, 57% of park visits last up to 1 hour with most people spending from 30 minutes to an hour at one of the parks (not including Alexandra Park). In 2021, 66% of visits to the parks last up to an hour, again with most people spending from 30 to 60 minutes in the parks. There was a significantly lower proportion of people spending between one and two hours at the parks in 2021, but more spending over two hours.

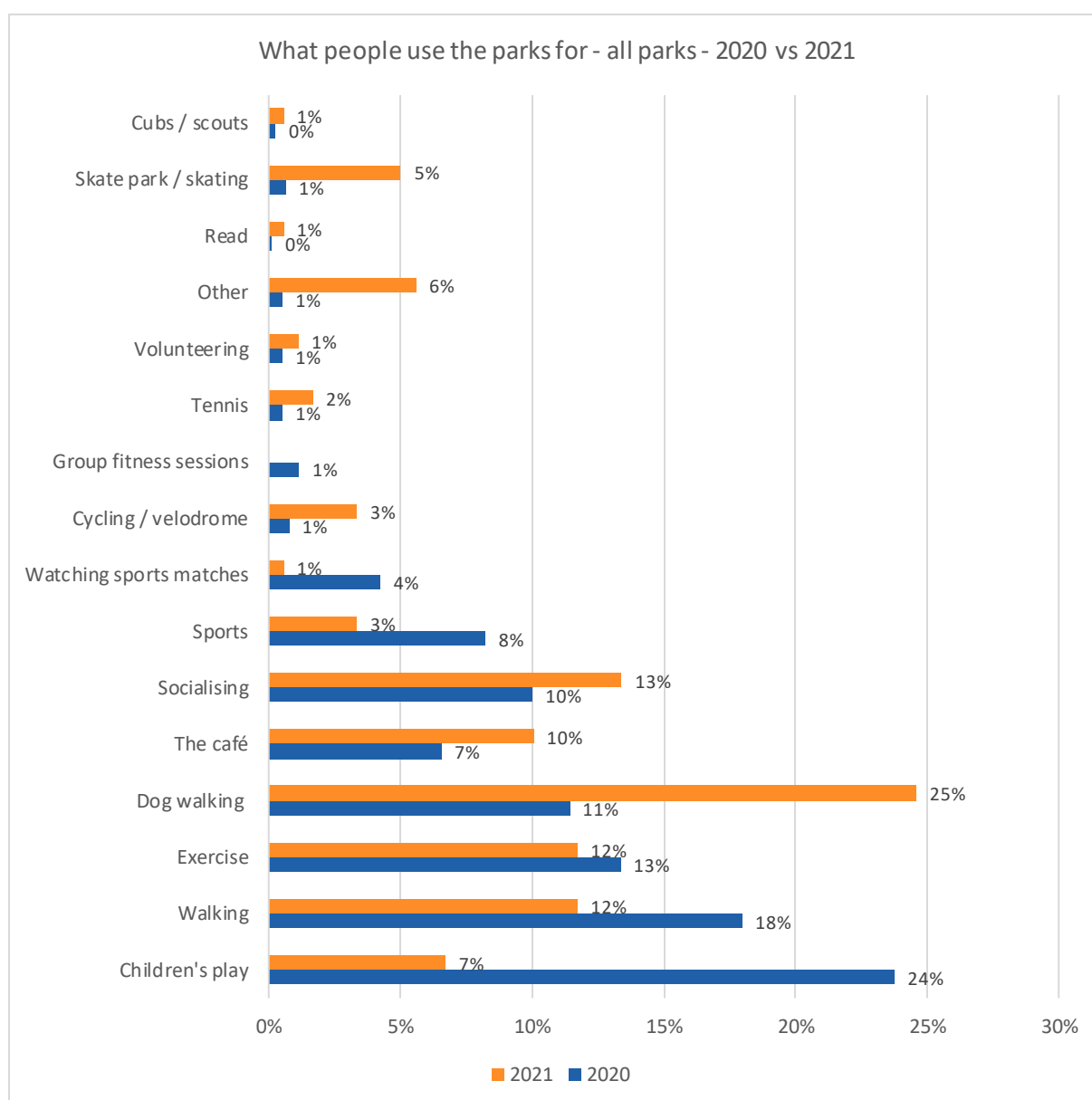


There are some significant variations in the duration of the visits to the three parks, with a significantly higher proportion of Alexandra Park users spending 30 minutes to an hour at the park.

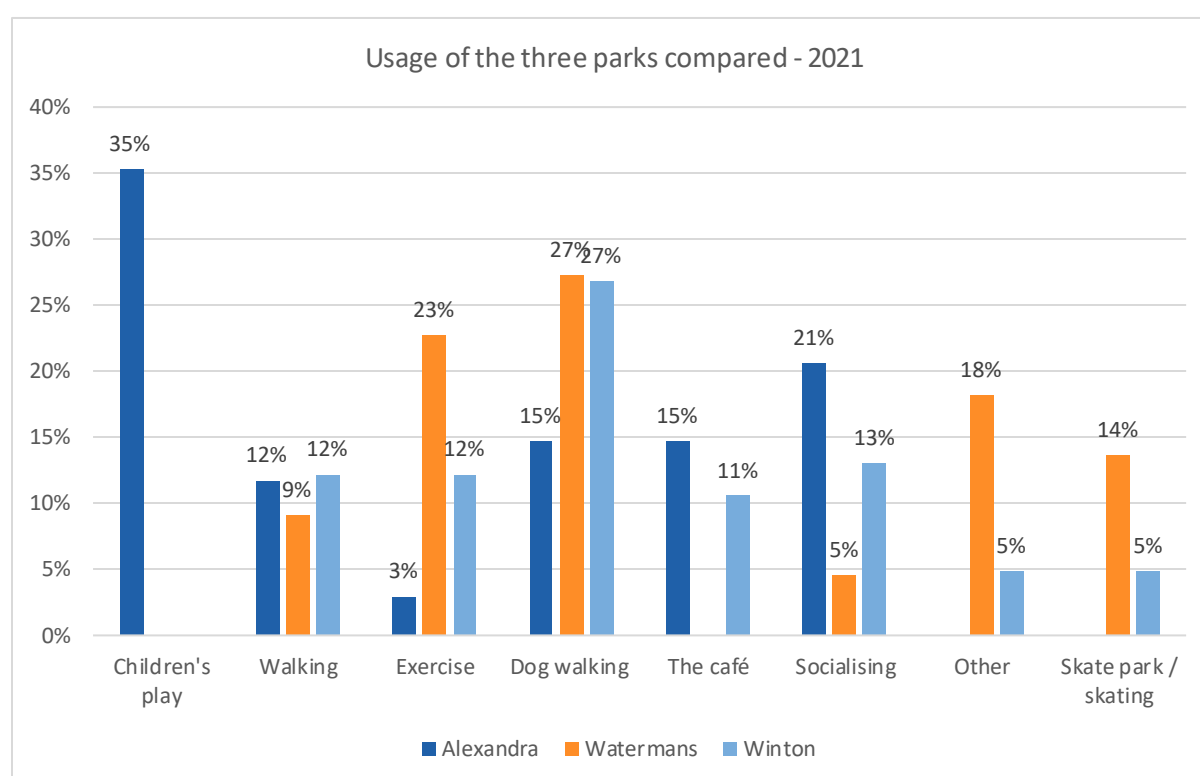


WHAT PEOPLE USE THE PARKS FOR

Children's play was the most popular reason for using the parks in 2020, but dog walking was the most common reason for using the parks in 2021; nearly double the rate for the next most popular reason – socialising. Observations made at the park suggest that many dogwalkers go there to also socialise e.g., the 'regulars' at Winton Park. Based on these same observations, it is possible that dog walkers were underrepresented in the 2020 survey, rather than overrepresented in the 2021 consultations. The overall observation is that people using the parks were generally active in some way i.e., they rarely arrived solely to use the café or to just sit on a bench – they usually arrived on foot and then walked in the park, either with or without a dog (68% of the 2020 survey respondents arrived at Winton on foot).



Comparing what people used the parks for across all three parks has not provided useful results because of the smaller sample size in 2021. The high proportion of people using Alexandra Park for the play area reflects the time at which the consultation stall ran – after school closing – and the results for Watermans are distorted by the small sample size. Activities recording 5% or less have been removed from the graph to make it easier to read, unless there is a higher score from one of the parks against which it can be compared e.g., the ratings for exercise. There are simple reasons for some of the variations e.g., there is a skate park at Watermans, hence the higher percentage for this activity, but no café there, explaining the zero score. People clearly used the play area at Winton but tended not to note this as the reason for using the area, because they were in the park to be generally active and / or use the café.



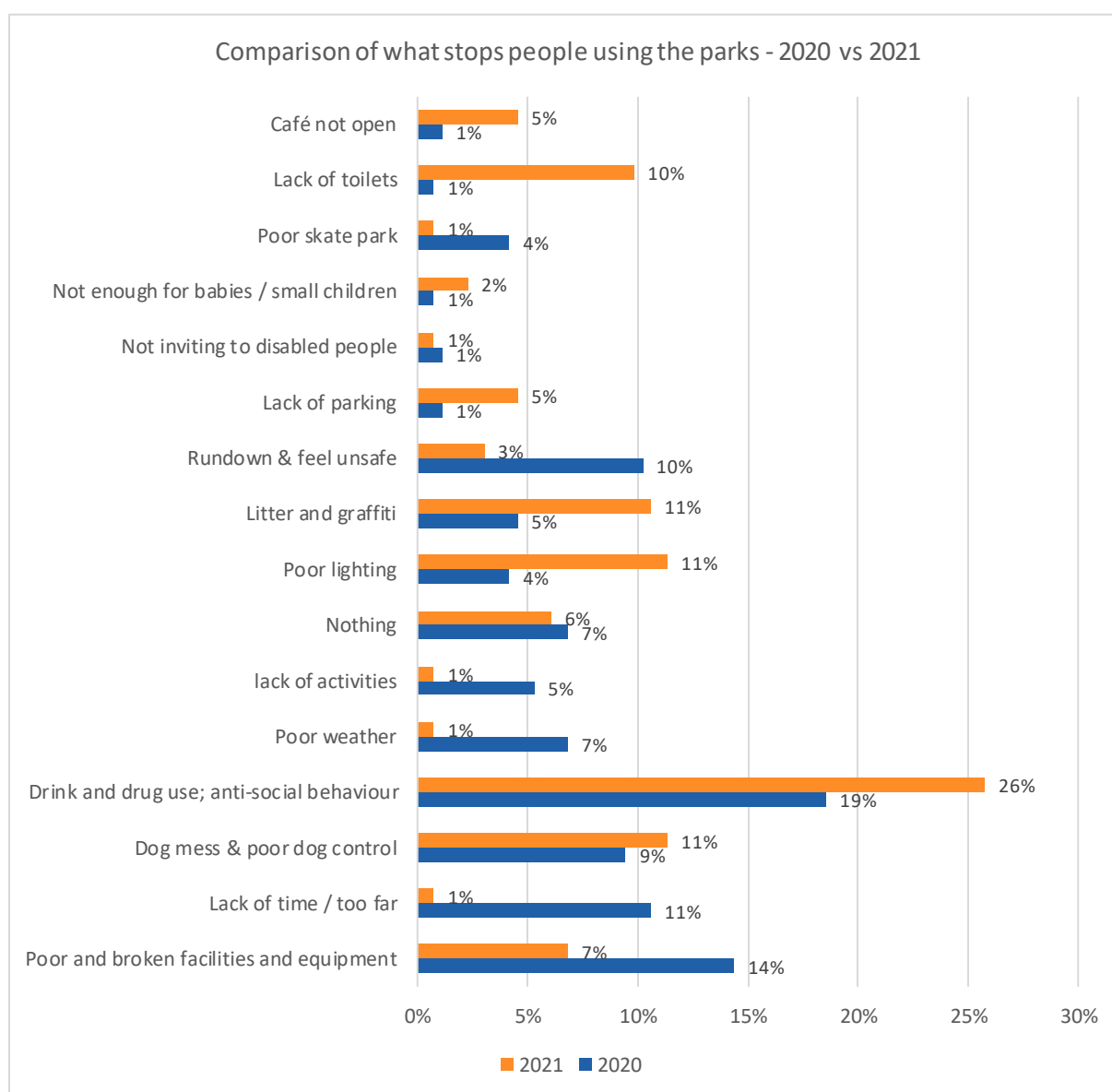
Combining the percentages for more active pursuits in the parks provides the following view, demonstrating the active nature of people's engagement with the parks, especially at Watermans and Winton. The layout of Alexandra Park does not lend itself to organised sports, but people were observed running through the park.

| | Walking | Exercise | Dog walking | Skating, other sports | Total |
|------------------|---------|----------|-------------|--------------------------|------------|
| Alexandra | 12% | 3% | 15% | - | 30% |
| Watermans | 9% | 23% | 27% | 14% | 59% |
| Winton | 12% | 12% | 27% | 7% | 58% |

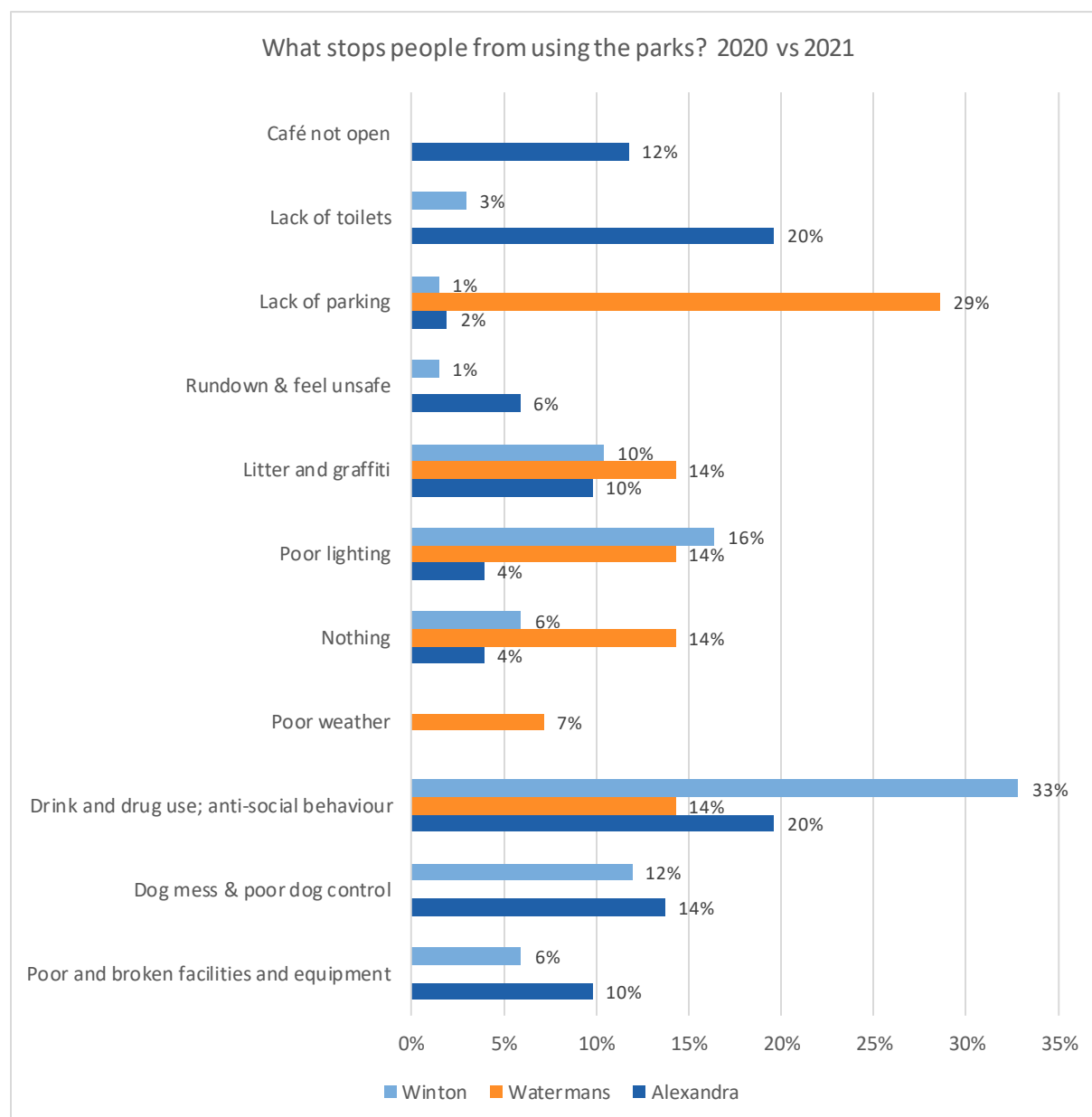
WHAT STOPS PEOPLE FROM VISITING THE PARKS?

In 2020, the abuse of drink and drugs was off-putting for a significant proportion for users of all the parks. Unfortunately, these problems were reported as being a more significant issue in 2021, along with increases for poor lighting, litter and graffiti, and a lack of toilets. The lighting issue nearly tripled in the proportion of responses, and comments made during the consultations referred to the lights at the skate park no longer being lit, and that Winton could do with more lighting on the main path through the park (to and from the café).

The other most significant issue in 2020 was poor and broken play facilities, mentioned by 14% of respondents. This was reported by half this proportion of respondents in 2021. The rating for the lack of toilets is up ten-fold e.g., no toilets at Alexandra Park other than through the erratically open café. Mention of the café at Alexandra Park not being open was up five-fold. Encouragingly, the proportion of respondents mentioning that the parks feel run down and unsafe was down by more than two-thirds from 10% to 3%. Dog mess and control are still a problem.



In 2020, respondents highlighted the problem of drug use and anti-social behaviour at Alexandra Park, linking the lack of toilets as a contributing factor (with people using the bushes instead) . In 2021, this problem is reportedly more prevalent at Winton Recreation Ground –this was certainly evident whilst running the consultation stalls and commonly reported by the people spoken to . Parking at Watermans Park is a notable concern (especially when parents drop off and pick up children at the school).



A SELECTION OF COMMENTS FROM ALEXANDRA PARK

“Problems with anti-social behaviour - drugs and drink ”

“Mix of play stuff needed to cater for older children ”

“If there is a new café, it needs to be open more ”

“Café closing in two weeks and no transition plan to a new arrangement - it is an important community facility and people will lose out ”

“Make the building available for hire / classes”

A SELECTION OF COMMENTS FROM WATERMANS PARK

“Sometimes there are fights / violence between kids and teenagers (from some children I spoke to)”

“Bring in cameras to reduce poor behaviour”

“Bring back the outdoor gym equipment x2”

A SELECTION OF COMMENTS FROM WINTON RECREATION GROUND

“There is Inappropriate use of the toilets for drink and drugs”

“Long grass has caused lots of health problems with dogs due to seed injuries, and non-clearance of dog mess. Maybe less long grass!”

There were a lot of comments about the long grass causing problems for dogs, but it did not seem to stop people using the park with their dogs.

“My dog likes running through the long grass”

“Not enough benches”

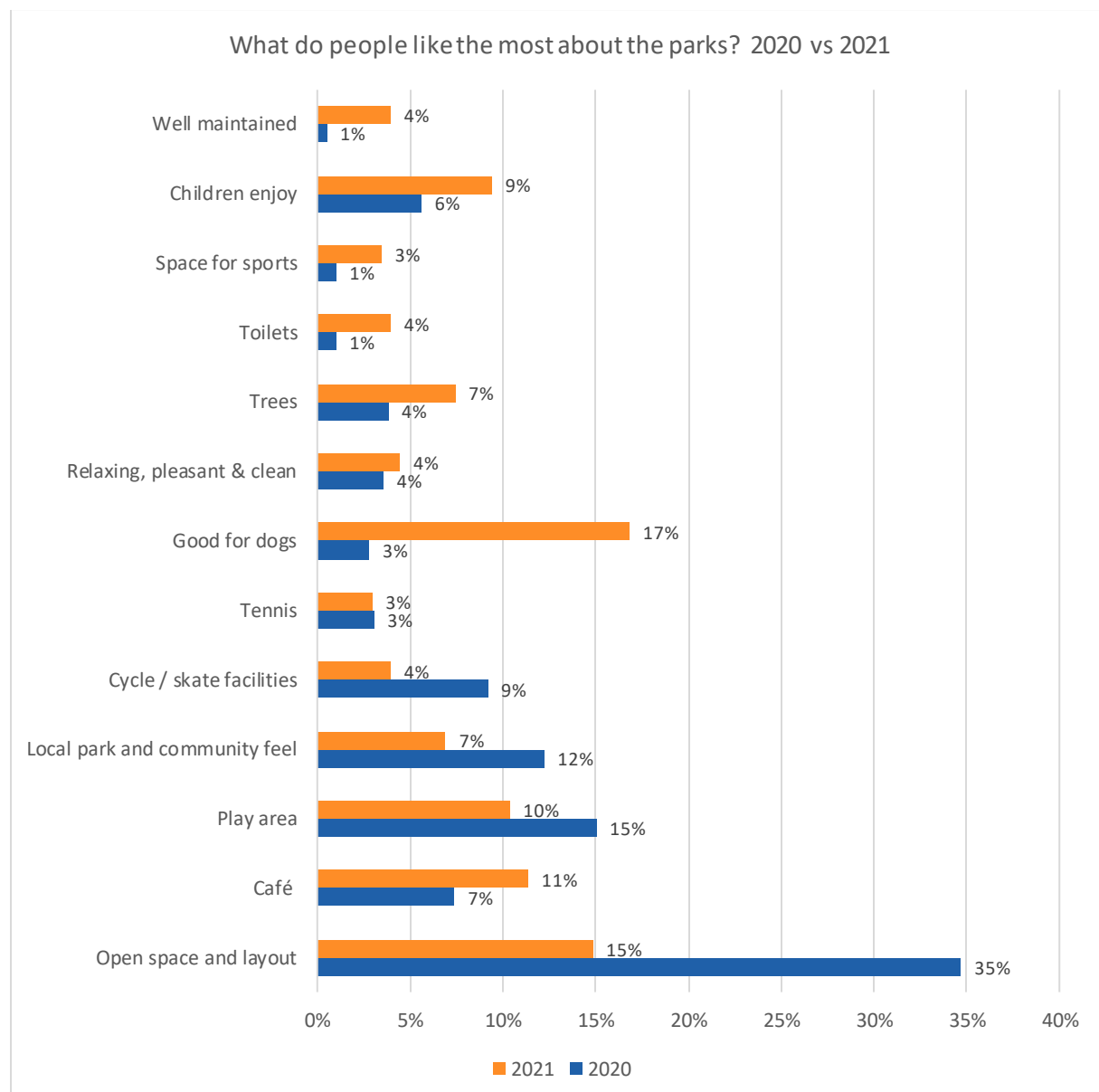
“Café (should) open more”

“Don't muck it up!”

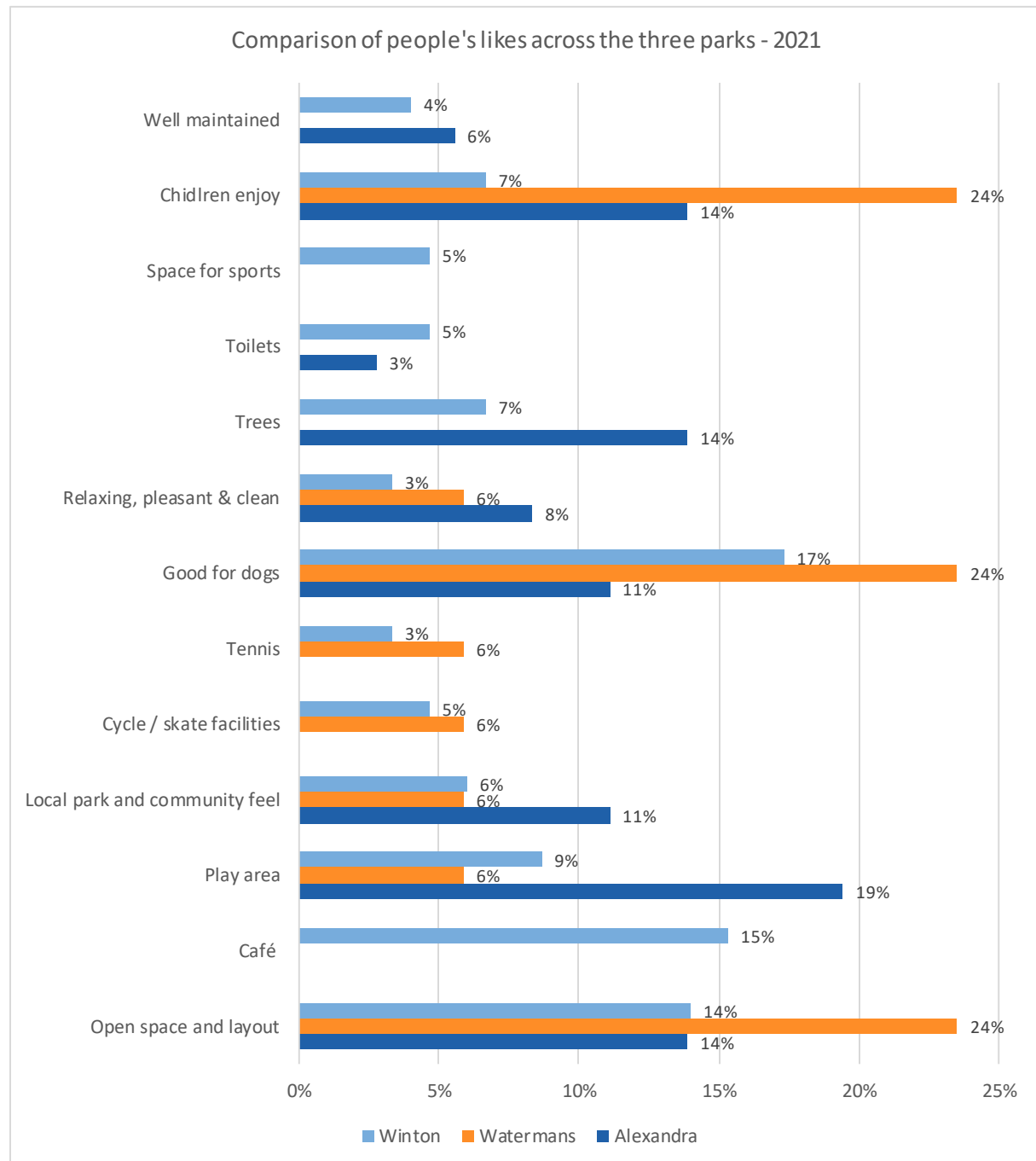
“Maybe some lighting on dark evenings to allow walking through the park until 7pm or so (on dark evenings / winter)”

WHAT PEOPLE LIKE MOST ABOUT THE PARKS

In 2020, one in three people appreciate the open spaces and layout of the parks more than any other attribute, more than double the number who like the play areas. This attribute was highlighted by a much lower proportion of people in 2021: 15% vs 34%. Reflecting the number of people using the parks for dog walking, this is at nearly six times the level that it was in 2020 (17% vs 3%). In 2021, there are higher 'ratings' for the café (at Winton), for trees, toilets, space for sports, children's enjoyment and being well-maintained. The remaining attributes show roughly similar ratings to 2020.



As in 2020, the data illustrates the different character and facilities provided by each e.g., Watermans Park has no significant areas of trees in the way that the other two parks have (although there are areas of trees around the edges, especially near the small river by the dual carriageway). Interestingly, the café at Alexandra Park was not chosen by anyone as something that they like.



A SELECTION OF COMMENTS FROM ALEXANDRA PARK

“People do voluntary litter picks of broken glass from drinkers and teenagers”

“Hold a fete or events? There is space for it, encourage better use (reduce antisocial behaviour)”

“Tap / fountain for dogs (like Winton)”

A SELECTION OF COMMENTS FROM WATERMANS PARK

“Need bins in far corner (around skate park) for beer bottles, and bins on school-side of the park x2”

“Bins are needed for the football spectators and teams to encourage tidier behaviour”

“(Want) more benches throughout the park”

A SELECTION OF COMMENTS FROM WINTON RECREATION GROUND

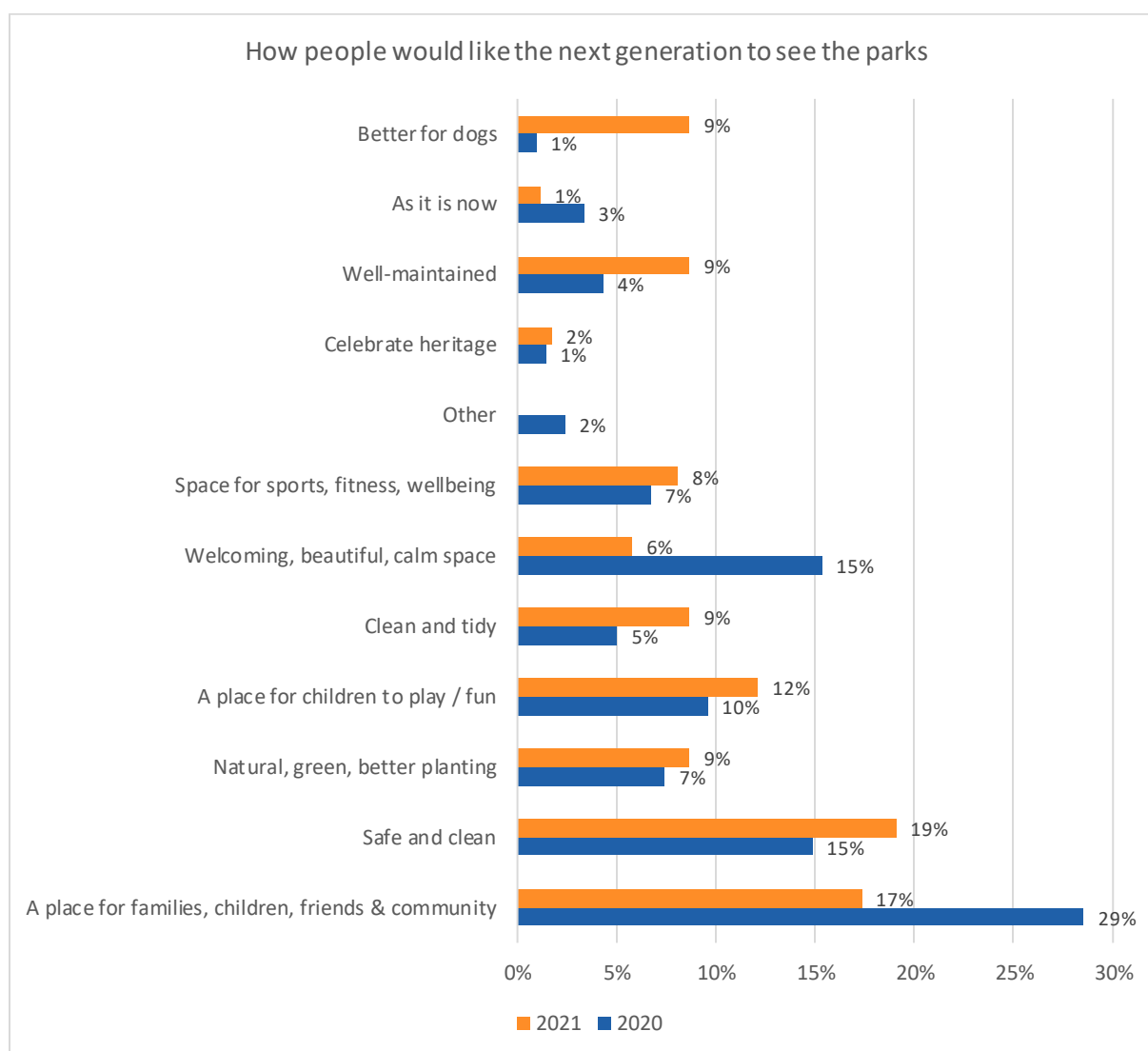
“More benches, more dog bins x2”

“Need evening lighting”

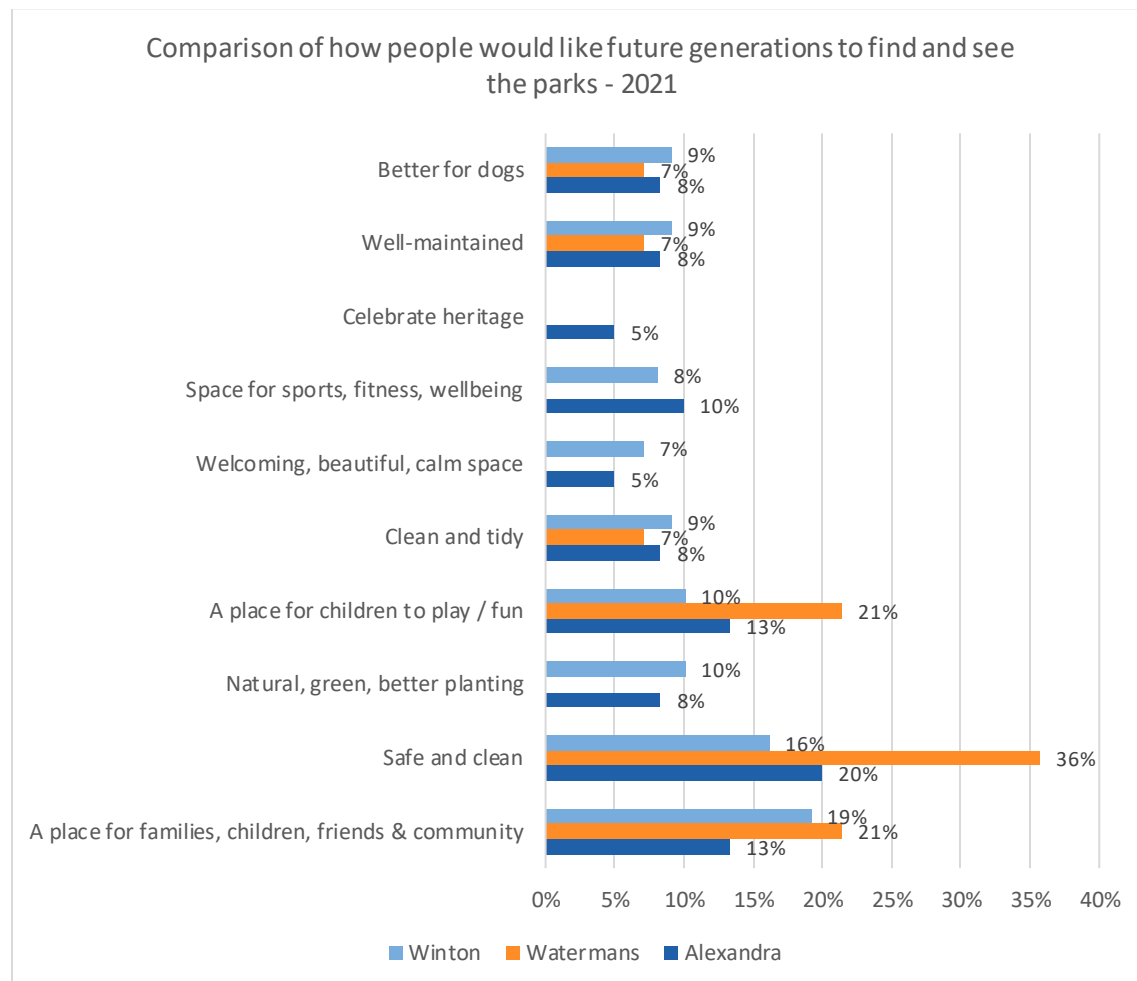
HOW PEOPLE WOULD LIKE THE NEXT GENERATION TO FIND AND SEE THE PARKS

In 2020, 29% of respondents want the parks to be places where family, children, friends and the community could come together, in a beautiful, safe and clean space (59% combined). On the smaller consultation stall sample, this has shifted downwards from 29% to 17% of responses, but with similar statements increasing their rating e.g., for being safe and clean, a place for children to play and well-maintained.

People in 2021 seem less interested in the parks being a 'welcoming, beautiful and calm space' (down from 15% to 6%), but they still want the parks to be 'natural, green and to have better planting'. They are also keen that the parks are 'clean and tidy' (5% in 2020 vs 9% in 2021).



The following graph shows that there are no significant differences in views across the three parks. Remember that the Waterman Park ratings are based on a small sample and so the difference between two and three people marking a statement can shift the rating by 7%.



ANALYSIS OF THE RESPONSES TO QUESTIONS ON THE FPA IMPROVEMENTS

INTRODUCTION

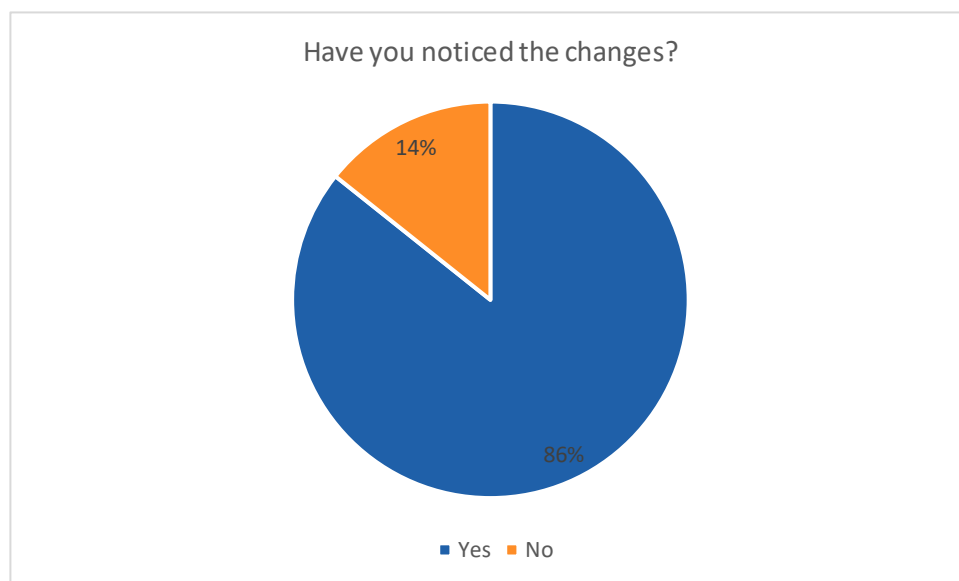
The consultation stalls provided an opportunity to find out what the park users think of the changes made this year under the FPA initiative. Park users were asked whether they had noticed and whether they like the specific changes in each park, and whether they like the idea of planned changes in the next 12 months.

ANALYSIS

Overall, a high proportion of park users have noticed the changes and like them. An even higher proportion like the idea of the planned improvements.

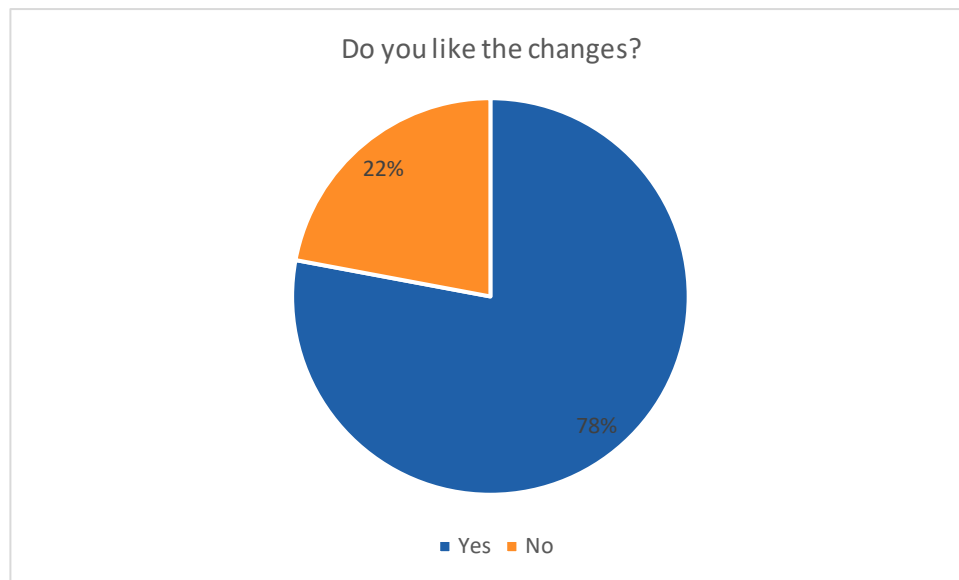
COMBINED RATINGS FOR NOTICING THE FPA CHANGES

The combined ratings from the three parks for whether people had noticed the changes are as follows:



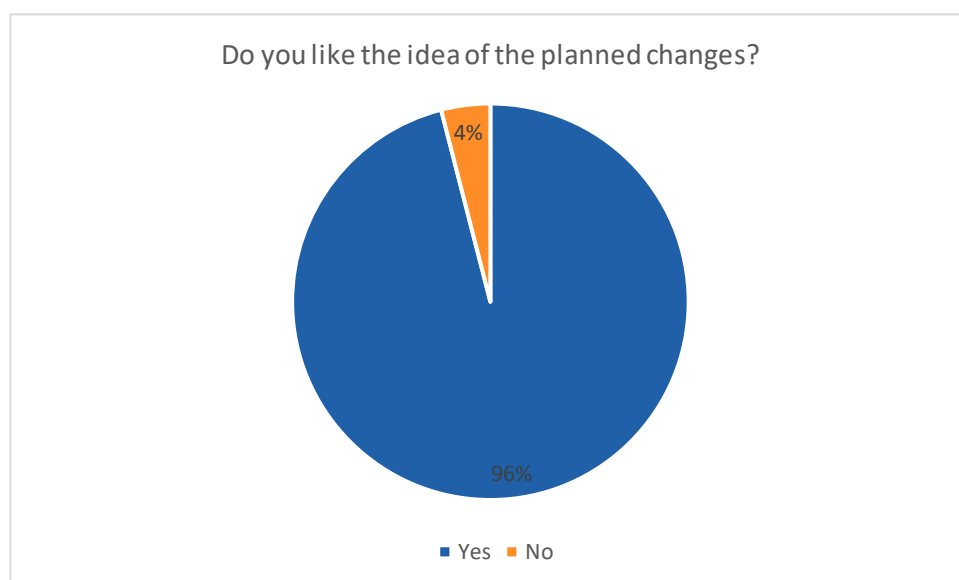
COMBINED RATINGS FOR LIKING THE FPA CHANGES

The combined ratings from the three parks for whether people liked the changes are as follows. Note that a good proportion of dog owners at Winton Recreation Ground were not keen on the long grass, noting that the seeds were lodging in the eyes and paws of dogs, leading to expensive vet bills. This was by far the main objection to the change in the mowing regimes at the three parks.



COMBINED RATINGS FOR LIKING THE PLANNED FPA CHANGES

The combined ratings from the three parks for whether people liked the changes are as follows:

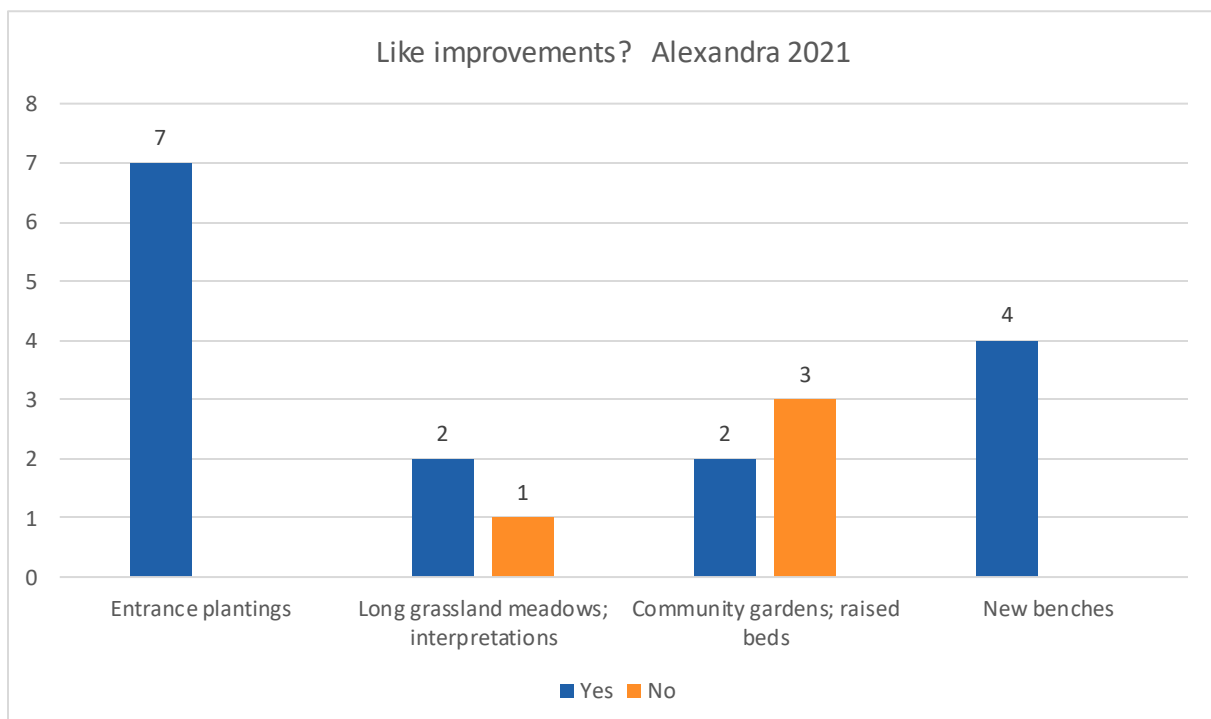


RATINGS FOR FPA CHANGES AT ALEXANDRA PARK

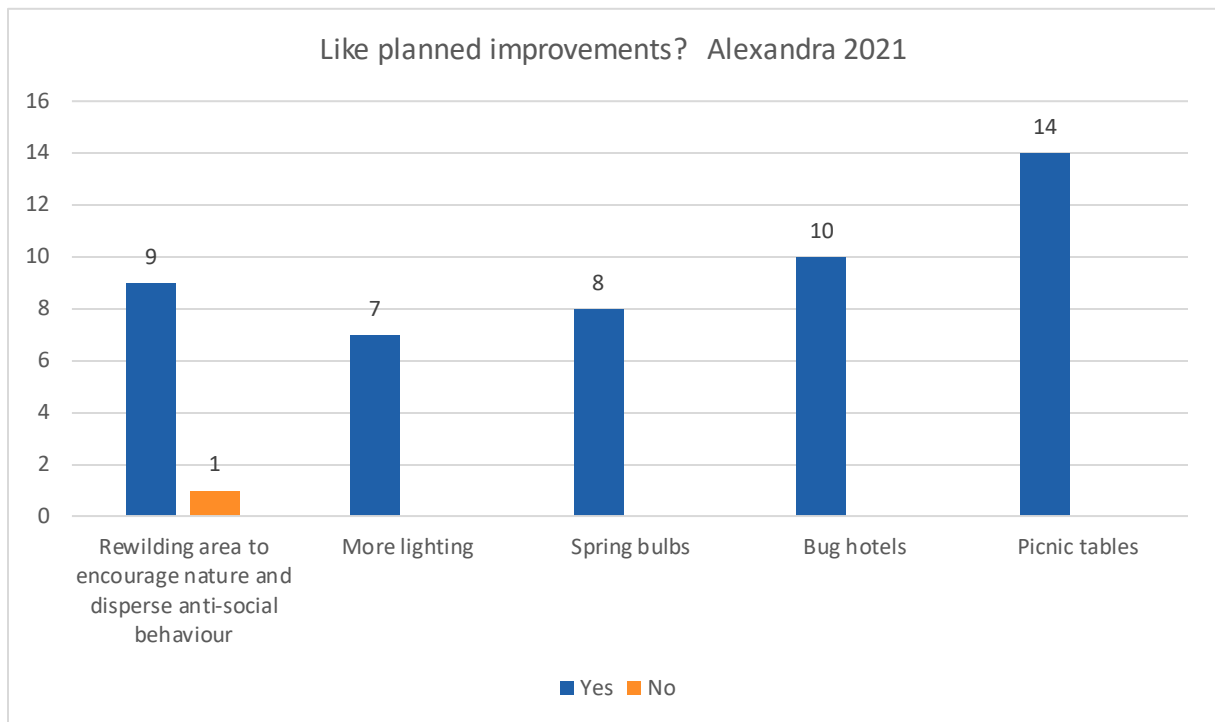
Except for the new benches, people have generally noticed the changes at the park.



There is a positive response to these changes, apart for the community garden / raised beds. It is not clear what people do not like about these. More people like the benches than say they have noticed them!

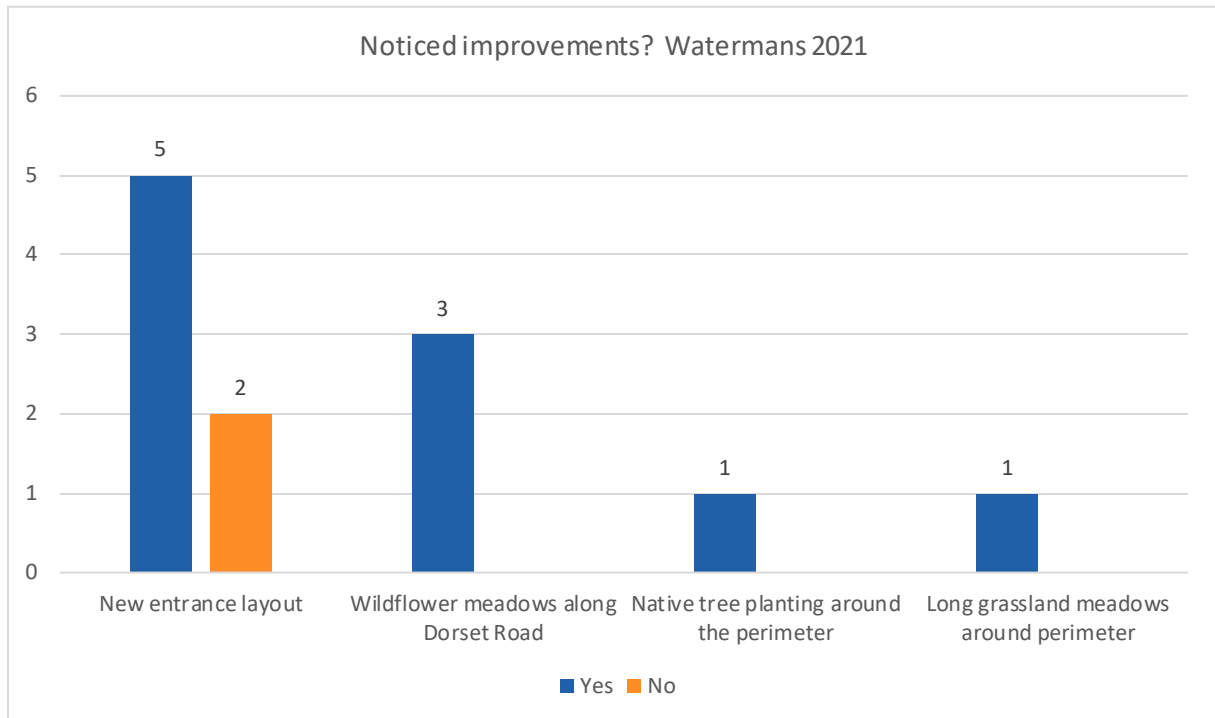


There was a strongly positive response to the planned changes.

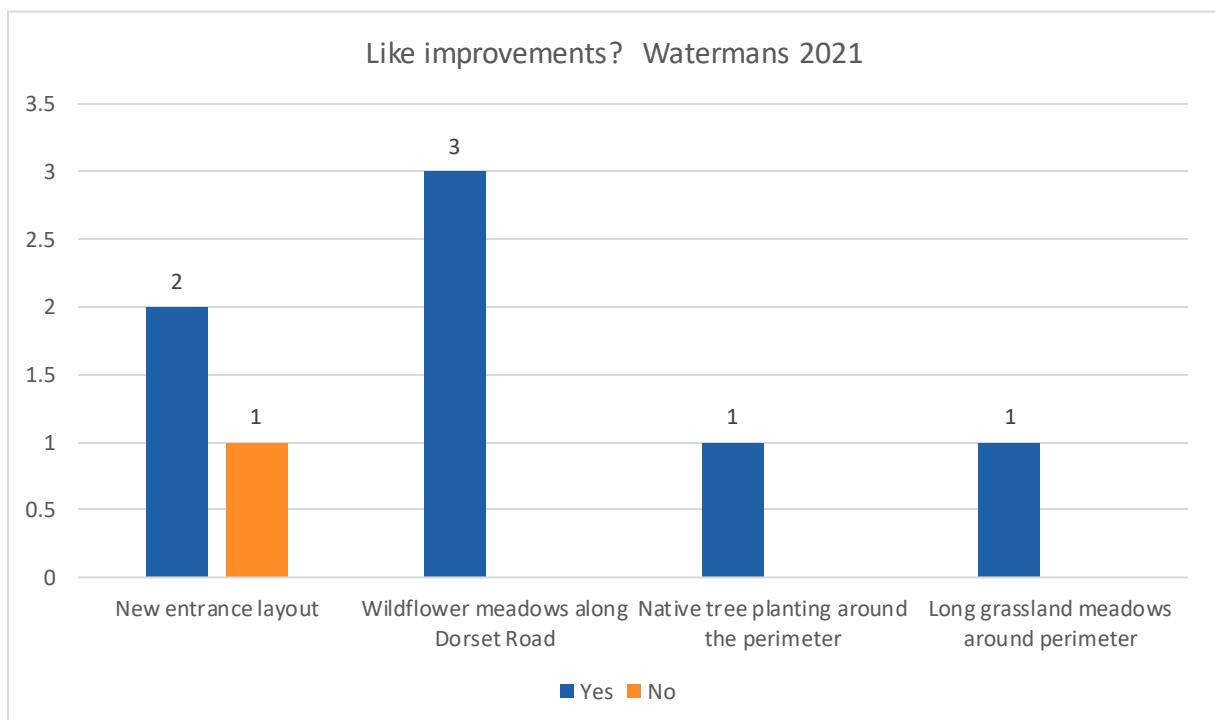


RATINGS FOR FPA CHANGES AT WATERMANS PARK

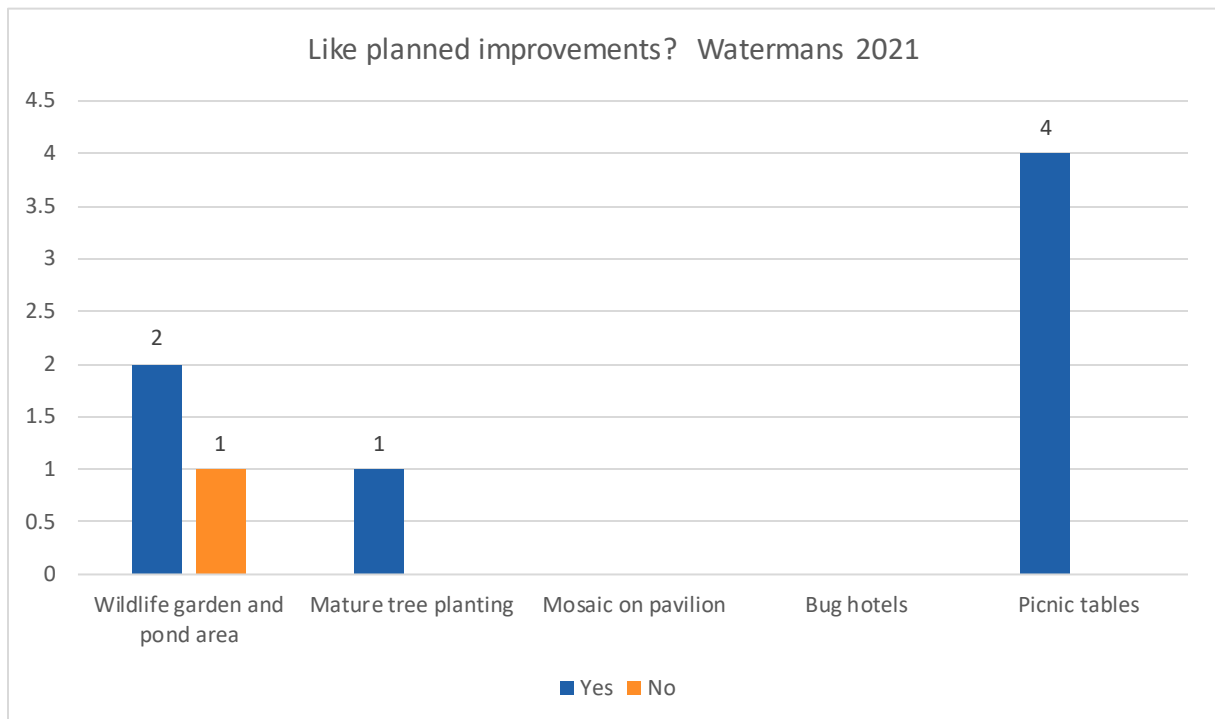
Nearly all the respondents had noticed the changes, with some not noticing the new entrance layout.



Overall, a good positive response to the changes.

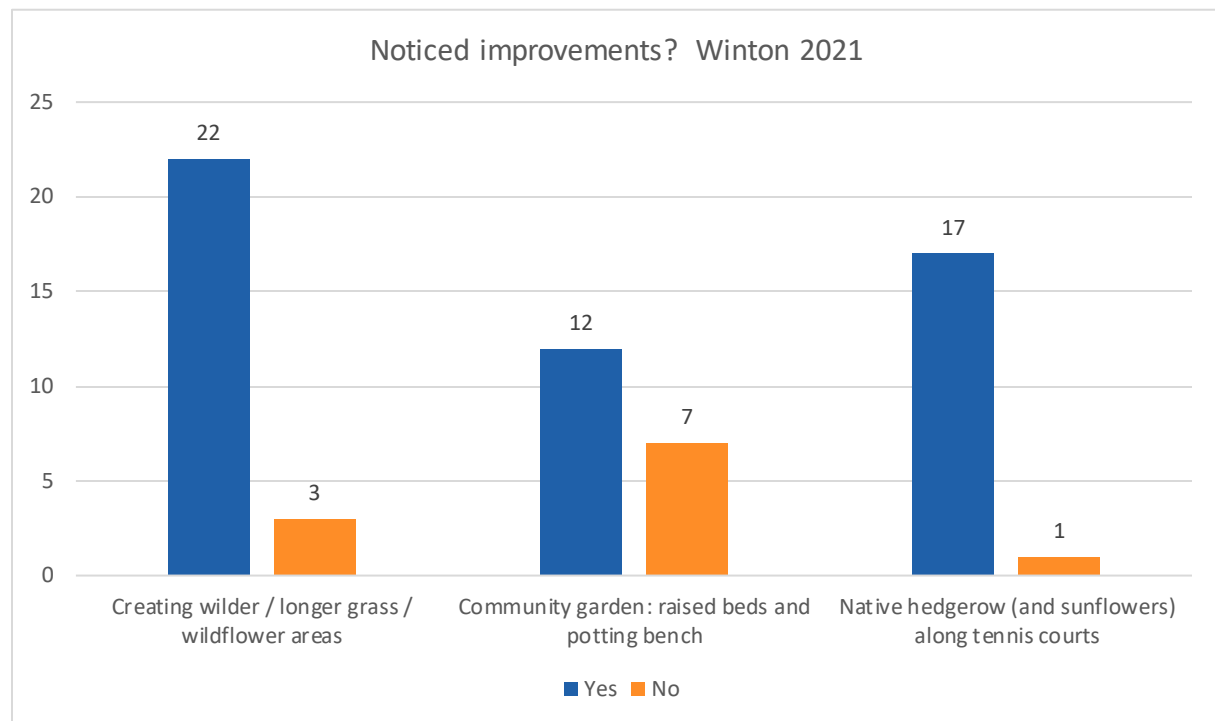


And a positive response to the planned changes.

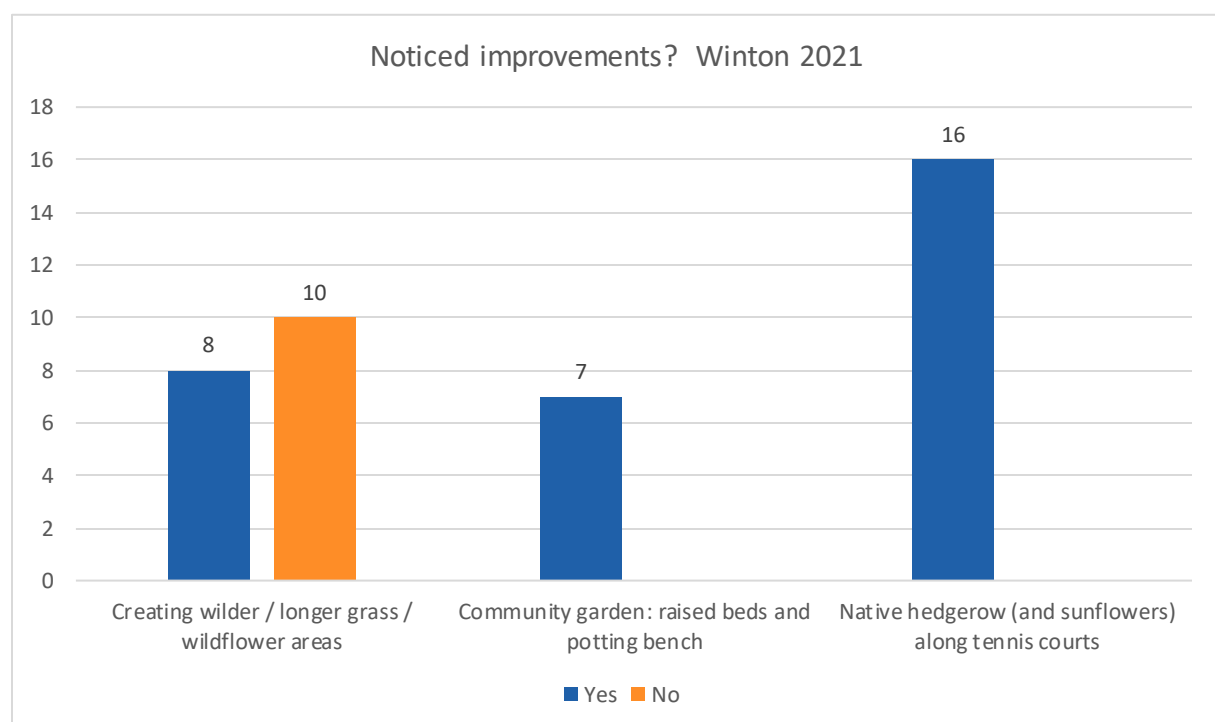


RATINGS FOR FPA CHANGES AT WINTON RECREATION GROUND

Generally, a high level of awareness of the changes at Winton, except for the community garden / raised beds which people had trouble placing.



Lots of positive responses here other than for the longer grass. This has caused problems for dog owners with the grass seeds getting into dog's eyes and paws, requiring removal by a vet.



Grumbles aside, there is an overwhelmingly positive reaction to the planned improvements. Some people queried whether dogs would have access to the pond; some in favour of this, some not. From a wildlife perspective, it would be better to keep the dogs out of the pond.

