



NFPGS Parks Survey for the MHCLG

– Summary of responses [April 21st - 22nd 2020]

Introduction

The Ministry of Housing Communities and Local Government contacted the NFPGS on Monday 20th April for feedback to the Government on parks usage during the public health crisis, and in particular over the previous weekend.

On Monday evening a survey was drafted by the NFPGS for Friends Groups based on the questions the MHCLG had indicated they wanted responses to. It was sent out late that evening to all NFPGS contacts, with a deadline of Wednesday midnight on 22nd April.

Responses

We had a total of 852 responses from England, Scotland and Wales, with the vast majority (over 800) from Friends of Parks groups. This is a very high level of response in a very short period of time, indicating massive interest in the issue and a keenness to feed back to Government.

The results should be seen as a very rough snapshot of the overall situation, bearing in mind a range of issues, including:

- some of the respondents were reporting about the same area or town
- some areas have a greater number of groups easily contactable
- there was an element of subjectivity
- individual locally-based groups may or may not be fully apprised of the wider situation throughout their Local Authority area
- not all groups are based on Local Authority-managed sites
- there was no distinction sought regarding country parks and urban public green spaces

However, the scale of the response can give confidence to the overall drift of the results.

The huge amount of open-ended comments also provides a telling picture of the views of the Friends Groups' movement to the vital importance of public access to greenspace during this crucial time of 'lockdown'.

Key Results

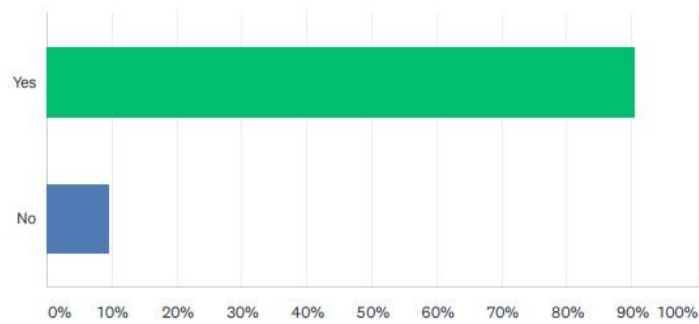
- a. 90% of those responding said that the parks in their area remained open.
- b. From those who said some parks were shut, the majority reported that around 90% remain open.
- c. Regarding whether those visiting parks and green spaces are doing so responsibly, 85% of respondents report that the general public is obeying the social distancing rules.
- d. Half of those who responded did not feel there were any barriers to parks remaining open. A quarter of respondents indicated social distancing non-compliance was a concern, particularly as green spaces are busier with more people cycling and jogging daily. There is also evidence that parks staff have been relocated to other council services, with lack of staff noted in the survey and comments given. Only 2% felt there was public pressure for closures.
- e. Many groups talk about their support for the maintenance of green spaces, for example emptying bins and undertaking hazard surveys. Most are reporting that their normal voluntary workdays have been stopped, with concerns raised about the potential for vandalism or disruption to wildlife. Many are reporting the closure of car parks associated with particular green spaces and the detrimental effects on disabled or less able users. Benches too have been cordoned off, which again impacts those with limited mobility by taking away resting places. There is scope here for clarification or better guidance from management.
- f. There is overwhelming support for parks and green spaces to remain open. Almost all groups providing comments (689) recognise their importance, particularly supporting the health of their communities, both physically and mentally, during these difficult times.
- g. Additional guidance for cyclists and joggers would be welcome, particularly around ensuring social distancing whilst passing walkers. Also, groups would welcome more generic signage in English and other languages. There has been a reported increase in fly-tipping and vandalism at some sites.

The full results in chart form

90% of those responding said that the parks in their area remained open.

Q3 Are all the parks in your Local Authority area open (even if parts of them, eg. playgrounds or sport areas, are sealed off)?

Answered: 833 Skipped: 19

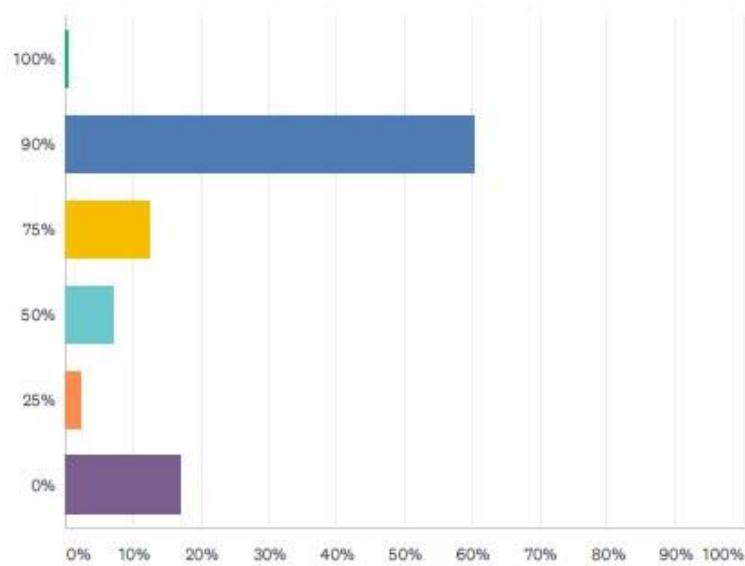


ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Yes	90.40%	753
No	9.60%	80
TOTAL		833

From those who said some parks were shut, the majority reported that around 90% remain open.

Q4 If no, roughly how many of your local parks and green spaces remain open?

Answered: 223 Skipped: 629

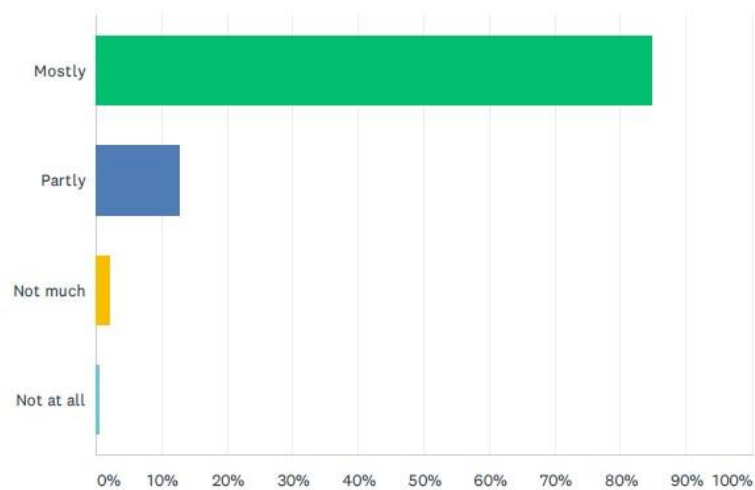


ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES
100%	0.45% 1
90%	60.54% 135
75%	12.56% 28
50%	7.17% 16
25%	2.24% 5
0%	17.04% 38
TOTAL	223

Regarding whether those visiting parks and green spaces are doing so responsibly, 85% of respondents report that the general public is obeying the social distancing rules.

Q5 Have the public been complying with social distancing over the weekend in your view?

Answered: 845 Skipped: 7



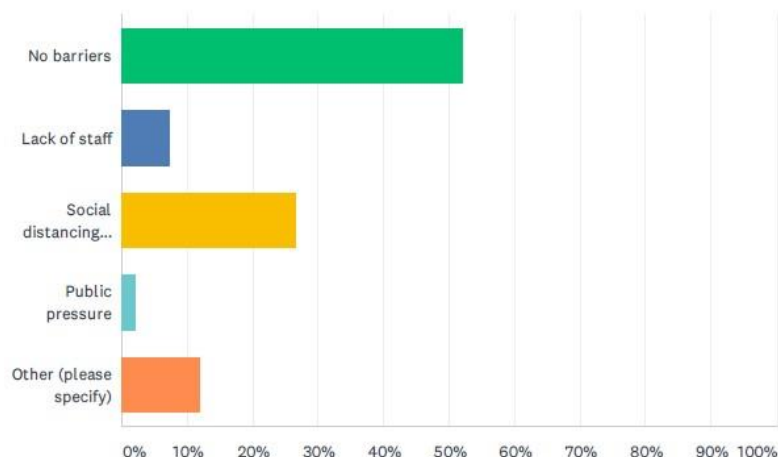
ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Mostly	84.73%	716
Partly	12.78%	108
Not much	2.13%	18
Not at all	0.36%	3
TOTAL		845

Half of those who responded did not feel there were any barriers to parks remaining open. A quarter of respondents indicated social distancing non-compliance was a concern, particularly as green spaces are busier with more people cycling and jogging daily. There is also evidence that parks staff have been relocated to other council services, with lack of staff noted in the survey and comments given. Only 2% felt there was public pressure for closures.

Many groups talk about their support for the maintenance of green spaces, for example emptying bins and undertaking hazard surveys. Most are reporting that their normal voluntary workdays have been stopped, with concerns raised about the potential for vandalism or disruption to wildlife. Many are reporting the closure of car parks associated with particular green spaces and the detrimental effects on disabled or less able users. Benches too have been cordoned off, which again impacts those with limited mobility by taking away resting places. There is scope here for clarification or better guidance from management.

Q6 What are the barriers (if any) to keeping parks open?

Answered: 826 Skipped: 26



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES
No barriers	52.06% 430
Lack of staff	7.38% 61
Social distancing non-compliance	26.51% 219
Public pressure	2.18% 18
Other (please specify)	11.86% 98
TOTAL	826

There is overwhelming support for parks and green spaces to remain open. Almost all groups providing comments (689) recognise their importance, particularly supporting the health of their communities, both physically and mentally, during these difficult times.

Additional guidance for cyclists and joggers would be welcome, particularly around ensuring social distancing whilst passing walkers. Also, groups would welcome more generic signage in English and other languages. There has been a reported increase in fly-tipping and vandalism at some sites.

See the raw data for the full range of comments.

As a random example, the first few comments were:

Mostly people comply with the social distancing but some don't and some allow their children to play on the play equipment which can't be shut off. Teenagers congregate in the evenings. the thing I find most challenging is the members of the public complaining about this on Facebook. I find it stressful to deal with. I would also like to take the opportunity to say that, when life is allowed to return to some kind of normality, please can some funding be allocated to parks and green spaces? Currently no maintenance is being done as it is not essential. Our parks are taking a big hit as the only spaces folks can go to. They will need support in the future for some tlc.

[From a Council] At first we were getting unkind comments as to why are we working in the parks as only essential workers were allowed to be out but eventually most of the public understood that the Parks are an essential service that needed to be maintained. Also we trained our operatives to be backup for grave digging and refuse collection just in case they are needed in these areas if the situation went critical.

Appreciation of parks has risen. Council and volunteers have worked to keep the park in a good condition

Issues experienced are those generally met in all publically accessible places, i.e. some not appreciating the imporatance of social distancing and/or not willing to make the effort or take the time to give others a little more room.

The thinking behind closing the parks is not new. There was a nice seat by the side of the road near me a few years ago, and young people started to congregate there and someone called the police when they got a bit noisy, so the police got the seat removed!

Allow people to have access to outdoor spaces and rely on them to follow government guidelines. Important for people and families who do not have gardens. Gives opportunity for daily exercise in fresh air. Green spaces are good for mental well being.

We would like to reinforce the critical importance of parks and open spaces, especially in cities, during this time. Our experience is that people are respecting the Government's social distancing guidelines, which suggests that the population of Bath want and need the parks to remain open for physical and mental wellbeing.

Play areas and small gardens with seating very close together have been closed by the local council where they can be. Children are playing in more open areas of the parks. Everyone I speak to is comfortable with this arrangement.

The mix of joggers, bikers, dogwalkers and pedestrians is a longstanding problem. Bikers can keep to roads now with less traffic. Joggers might be required to keep to or outside certain hours, leaving free space for pedestrians to move around safely.

More people than usual are using Clapham Common especially those with children

No - other than thank you for attempting to ensure that all local parks, open spaces and beauty spots are accessible to the public and open to avoid over-crowding in particular areas.

Only to state that the value to our physical and mental health of these underfunded public areas has never been more apparent. I hope the realisation of this will live on in Govt policies after the pandemic.

It has become apparent just how important parks are to everyone, regardless of circumstances. It is also apparent how few parks and open spaces there are, especially outside of London (which is very lucky as it has a lot of parks). Birmingham city centre, for example has nothing, it is a concrete and tarmac nightmare and I really feel for the people who live there. More parks and open spaces need to be created. The open space we look after has been full of visitors walking in from the village. It is a beautiful, but small, open space which has been the saviour of many residents' mental health. We would like to increase its size but adjoining land is owned by property developers and the County Council, in hope value, even though there is little chance of it being built on. Our parks and open spaces need more protection and expanding to cater for the increasing urban population. This is nothing short of a crisis.

Staff having to share across borough

All Friends groups activities such as gardening/working parties are officially stopped as being non-essential. Individuals belonging to the groups had hoped to continue, for exercise and mental well-being and would easily be able to keep social distancing, but were stopped. As a result standards will drop, plants could be lost due to drought and it will take a huge effort to catch up eventually.

Our park is spacious and links to footpaths for other walks. Open access very important and much valued. Some do sit on benches, on the grass or by riverbank, but socially distanced in ones, twos or families. Many of us have commented on the lovely birdsong this year.

Dog walkers, families, joggers. All conforming. We have had couple of occasions with groups of young people playing football and some using outdoor gym ignoring the posters.

So important to keep open for people's mental health

Parks are vital for mental well-being, especially for those with no access to a garden and for families with young children.

It's essential that people - especially those without gardens - are able to get outside into the fresh air and open space of public parks. In general, most people are complying with social distancing.

It would seem people are increasingly recognising their importance and also doing things like clearing after themselves (MAINLY) people using as an educational resource whilst home schooling and doing things that connect them more - exploring less trodden paths and taking photos etc.

Parks are a necessity.