

Consultation on public parks

A recent household survey by the Knowle, Dorridge and Bentley Heath Neighbourhood Forum (KDBH-NF) (May/June 2016 with 2844 responses from 16+ population of approximately 15200) showed that 30% of respondents put 'parks and open spaces' in their top five reasons for wanting to live in the area. Other aspects such as greenbelt, countryside and the natural environment also scored very highly as desirable features.

Further examples from the analysis include:

A large majority of respondents (79%) want KDBH-NF to create a full 'Green Spaces Plan';

91% (the biggest response of the whole survey) want KDBH-NF Plans to look at maintaining and improving present green space and recreational areas;

82% want policies to protect existing mature / important trees, hedgerows and woodland.

The retention and enhancement of public parks and spaces is clearly seen as a very high priority by local residents.

The importance of parks is not just for fitness, leisure and sport but also seen as enhancing the environment and contributing to well-being. Our parks currently have provision such as tennis courts, pitches, goalposts, fitness equipment that are used for the benefit of local people and are readily accessible. Children's playgrounds make a considerable contribution to fitness through enjoyment at an early age and help develop habits for later life.

We are fortunate that Solihull Council maintains its parks, open spaces, hedgerows, trees and verges to a very high standard compared with other areas of the country. This contributes considerably to the high quality of life that those living in the area are able to enjoy.

In a time of financial challenge, the following suggestions are made to access additional funding streams to preserve and enhance parks and open spaces:

- Revenue could be enhanced through the use of pitches by established clubs, particularly football and cricket;
- From our responses, it is probable that local people would be willing to pay a higher council tax if it was necessary to retain and enhance parks and open spaces;
- Parks could be sponsored by businesses in the same way that some roundabouts and gardens have sponsors;
- Lottery funding;
- Adoption of areas by groups of local people -there are already successful schemes in operation.

Suggested policies that retain and develop open spaces:

- Retention of any existing space that is within a development scheme;
- Requirement for builders of medium and large developments to include a stipulated percentage of open space;
- Greater use of TPOs and the equivalent for open spaces owned by companies, schools, etc in order to prevent erosion of open spaces, trees and hedgerows due to cost implications.

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