

‘Friendly Parks for All’ consultation Challenges faced by blind or visually impaired park users. Consultation key findings March 2020



As part of Richmond Council’s continued commitment to improving our parks and open spaces, the Parks Team carried out a consultation to understand how blind people or those with visual impairments and their families / carers currently use our parks. The consultation forms part of the Friendly Parks for All Project managed through Richmond Council’s Parks Department and referenced work proposed for Kneller Gardens, Twickenham. Read the full consultation report https://haveyoursay.citizenspace.com/richmondccs/friendly-parks-19/consult_view/

The London Borough of Richmond has:

5680 people who suffer from visual impairment
285 people who are blind.
The total number will rise to 7290 in 2030.

580 people who have visual impairment or sight loss also have an additional disability. 70 blind people have an additional disability.

120 Children (aged 0-25) in the borough are blind or partially sighted and 59 of these have additional educational needs.(2019)

RNIB [Sight Loss Data Tool](#), 2020

Consultation respondents

A total of 13 people responded to this consultation.

1 of the respondents was blind,
1 respondent was visually impaired
1 had another family member who was visually impaired.

9 respondents were answering on behalf of a family member who was either visually impaired or blind.

1 respondent was a local resident with no visual impairment of family member with a visual impairment

Number of Parks Visited

- 80% visited more than one park.
- A total of 18 different parks were mentioned
- All respondents visited between 1 and 8 parks with an average of 3.4 parks/residents.

Frequency of park visits

- 61.5% of respondents visit a park at least once a week,
- 31% at least once a month, and
- 8% less than once a month.
- 5% of respondents visit a park at least once a week,
- 31% at least once a month,
- 8% visit less than once a month

What do you like about parks?

- Parks infrastructure - level, well maintained and defined pathways and benches were all mentioned
- The natural environment - the variety of trees and flowers and being out in a park or open space.
- Opportunities for sports and exercise
- Other comments included the good variety of equipment on offer in some parks.
- One respondent commented that they felt safe

Accompanied visits

All respondents said that they visited local parks.

Most respondents visit parks and open spaces accompanied by a blind or visually impaired person or with a sighted person.

The Friendly Parks for All project

The Friendly Parks for All project aims to:

1. Encourage more use of parks and open space in the borough
2. Works with partners to help improve the quality of everyone’s experience of parks
3. Increase the number and diversity of people inspired by and enjoying them. [Read more](#)



New path surface installed February 2020 to minimise tree roots and to create a level defined path along the river.

Barriers to visiting parks

Problems with parks infrastructure (e.g. paths, steps) was mentioned by 38% of respondents
Other things that were identified as hazards for blind and visually impaired park users were:

- badly maintained slippery and dangerous paths that are not swept.
- potholes and foxholes
- badly maintained slippery and dangerous paths that are not swept.
- Uncleared dangerous rubbish
- Broken glass and cans.

Additional barriers identified

Other barriers identified by respondents included:

- Getting to the park (31%)
- Lack of parking near the park (23%).
- Nothing to do (23%) and
- Inappropriate equipment (23%).
- Fear for family safety.(This was mentioned by 2 people but there were no comments made to elaborate on this issue.)
- Lack of disabled toilets in parks.



How can accessibility be improved for people who are blind or visually impaired?

Many of the responses to this question focused on the improvement of parks infrastructure for blind and visually impaired people.

- Most respondents (85%) would like to have level footpaths that were firm or slip resistant,
- 15% mentioned tactile paving.
- 38% thought that safe access to the river in Kneller Gardens was important.
- Tactile labelling, and appropriate maps and signs were thought to be important by 54% of respondents,
- Only 2 respondents thought that braille signs were important.
- Information about the parks and facilities were important to 46% of respondents.
- Additional seating was mentioned by 2 respondents.

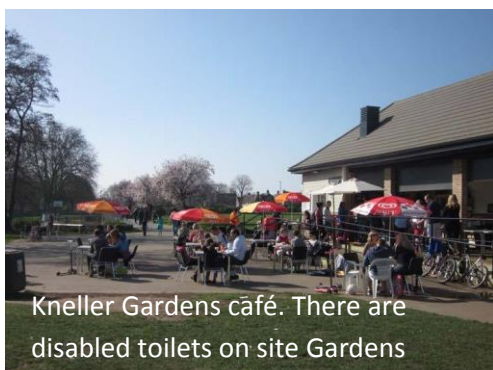
Suggested improvements

Suggestions from respondents to improve park visits included:

- Restrictions of use to cyclists and dogs
- Specific area for exercise of dogs
- Quieter areas specifically for those who are blind and visually impaired or other neurological diseases
- Improved parks maintenance – filling in potholes including in grass area, clearing paths and picking up rubbish
- Additional outdoor gyms and shared cycling schemes
- Signs and maps modified to benefit VI park users.

Accessible equipment and facilities

- A specially designed tree trail,(62%),
- Sensory experiences including plantings to improve the sensual experience of being outside (54%)
- Tactile maps and signs (54%) were chosen by respondents as features that would make the park more accessible for those with sight impairment.
- Tactile Wooden sculptures / seating
- Sensory planting - fragrant flowers
- Benches that are suitable to people with limited mobility
- Supported bike riding
- Noisy toys
- Open air gym equipment



Recommendations

Recommendations in the design of future Friendly Parks for All in the borough include improvements to park infrastructure, and good parks maintenance. The consultation also highlighted the importance of developing an awareness of the benefits of spending time in parks and open spaces for blind and visually impaired people. The recommendations will be modelled at Kneller Gardens as part of the Friendly Parks for All project.

Recommendations

Improvements to park infrastructure

- Ensure that there are an adequate number of regularly placed benches in the park that are in good repair and suitable for people with limited mobility.
- Include a variety of equipment (playpark and outdoor gym equipment) suitable for people who are blind or have visual impairments
- Ensure that the path network is suitable for people who are blind or visually impaired, that there are no obstructions (e.g. tree roots), unnecessary steps and that there are handrails where there are steps.
- Gates, stiles, chicanes and other barriers to access should also be limited and only used where necessary.
- Ensure that Friendly Parks for All are located near transport links and that there is adjacent disabled parking available for use by blind and visually impaired visitors.
- For Kneller Gardens explore with the consultation group what additional equipment and facilities would make the park more accessible. This would include accessible signs, information appropriate activities including companion cycling.
- Ensure that where possible there is a disabled toilet available in the local area. This should be referenced within the park so that it is obvious to park users and included in any information about the park facilities.

Recommendations

Good park maintenance

- Ensure that paths and grassed areas are safe to use for people with disabilities including those who are blind or have visual impairments.
- This includes removing any hazardous materials (e.g. glass and cans) regularly,
- ensuring that leaves, mud and other slip hazards are regularly removed,
- Fill in potholes and fox holes.
- Uncleared dangerous rubbish
- Broken glass and cans.

Recommendations

Developing awareness

- Develop awareness of the benefits of spending time in parks and open spaces for blind and visually impaired people.
- Ensure that there is accessible information available in appropriate formats so that blind and visually impaired people can plan their trips to the parks.
- Raise awareness among park users of the needs of people with disability including people who are blind and visually impaired.
- Where possible include a Help Point e.g. at the park café.
- Include signage and accessible information

Recommendations

Design requirements

- Develop the sensory infrastructure within parks including sensory trails, sensory features such as sculptures and benches etc. Consider including sensory planting where possible.
- Design nature into the Friendly Parks for All schemes as the consultation shows that this is the one thing that people like most about their visits to parks.
- Try to incorporate quiet areas for reflection and to feel close to nature into the design.
- Design these areas so that there is limited intervention from other park users including cyclists and dog walkers.