



Consultation on Merstham Recreation Ground redevelopment: summary report

About the consultation

Reigate & Banstead Borough Council is refurbishing Merstham Recreation Ground (referred to as 'Merstham Rec' or 'the park' in this document) in 2021/22. With a budget of £1.5 million the council will provide a park that all local users will enjoy and benefit from. The park will provide play and fun, access for all, access to nature, improved wellbeing, ways to help people be active, and be an asset for the community.

The consultation is taking place in two phases and is based on the wish to involve residents in the process from early on so that the park better meets their needs and local interests.

This report is about phase 1 – getting initial feedback from local people about how they use the park, their likes and dislikes about the park in its current form and their preferences for future facilities. This took place in September and October 2020.

Phase 2 of the consultation will take place in 2021. It is likely to include some small group discussions with local residents and representatives from groups in the community as well as a second public survey to ask residents their views on the developed design.

Key findings

- Merstham Recreation Ground is seen as an important asset to the local community (68.1% of participants said they use it at least once a week)
- Top uses at present are: a place to walk (69.1%), a place to relax and get fresh air (37.7%) and a place to play (37.5%)
- Local perceptions are that its current facilities are lacking, are of insufficient quality and are overdue for updating.

- The feeling of open space and multiple access routes are valued by its users.
- 67% of participants come to the Rec with their children, 52.3% come with their partner, 50.2% come alone and 45.5% come with friends.
- New play facilities for children, including older children and teens are seen as a priority (53.9% of participants ranked this as their first choice for new or improved facilities).
- New all-weather paths provided early on in the works would enable a large cross section of residents to enjoy the new park relatively quickly.
- Participants report that flooding of the pitches stops people enjoying the park and residents would like this to be addressed in the new Rec.
- Many local people would like to see a café or other refreshments facility included in the plan – though not all agree.
- Regardless of whether a café forms part of the scheme, residents would like improved seating, shaded areas and places to picnic.
- The local footballing community request drainage to be addressed and an all-weather pitch.
- Security and anti-social behaviour is a current concern and there are fears that this will worsen if more people use the Rec.
- The park serves multiple functions in an area where many do not have gardens and where household finances may be tight: exercise, play and leisure, connect with nature, place to socialise, for fresh air and to be alone.

How we consulted

The consultation took place through a survey which was delivered to 2,900 homes in Merstham, publicised online through social media and the council's website, and promoted through local media. The council also emailed the survey to local community groups, such as sports clubs, older people's groups and children's or family support groups.

The survey included a combination of closed (e.g. multiple choice) and open questions (e.g. asking for comments) asking residents their views and experiences of the park at present, their likes and dislikes about it and their priorities for what they would like it to include in future. Variations of the main survey were available to young people and to community groups. A dedicated email address was also available for groups and individuals to use to contact the council direct if they wished.

The survey was open from 9 September to 5 October.

Participation

654 people took part in the main survey, the vast majority being people who lived in Merstham.

Most people who took part in the survey lived very locally to the Rec: 85% said they lived within a 10-minute walk, a further 6% lived further away but within Merstham. The remaining 9% lived elsewhere.

47 children and young people completed the young people's survey.

9 local community groups completed the stakeholder organisation survey.

Results

1. Participants describe Merstham Rec as an important but underused asset providing a vital and convenient outdoors space.

It is a place that provides a link with nature, for exercise, fresh air, to meet others and a place to enjoy solitude. In an area where many residents report they lack their own outdoor space of their own, participants felt these were especially important.

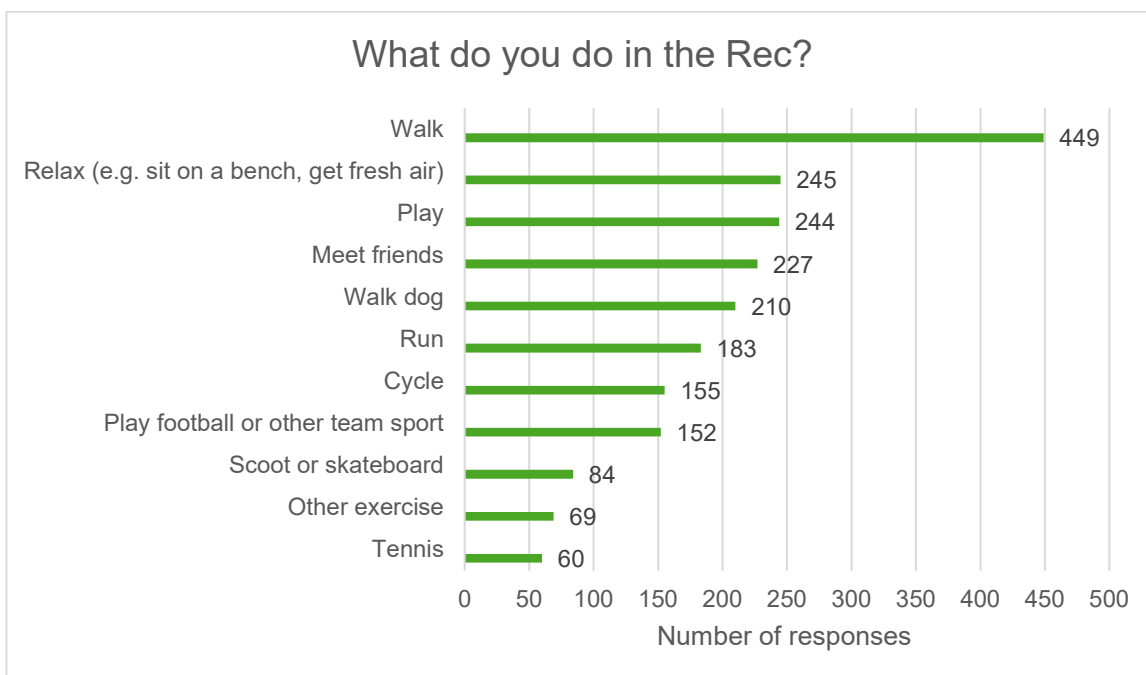
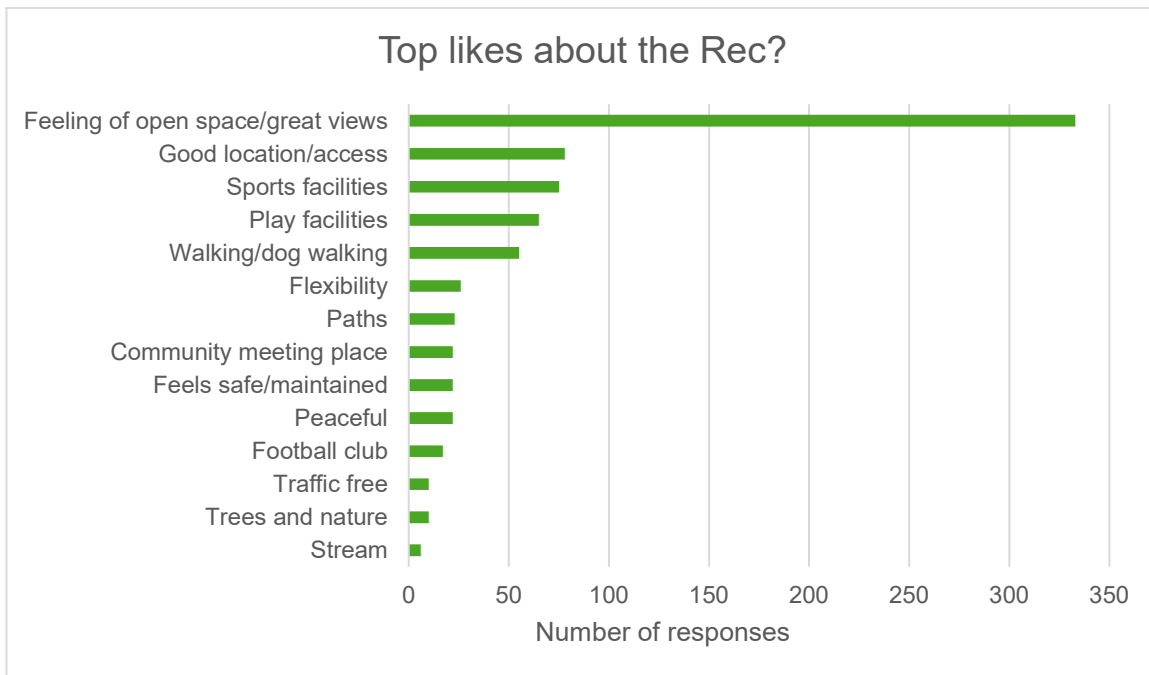
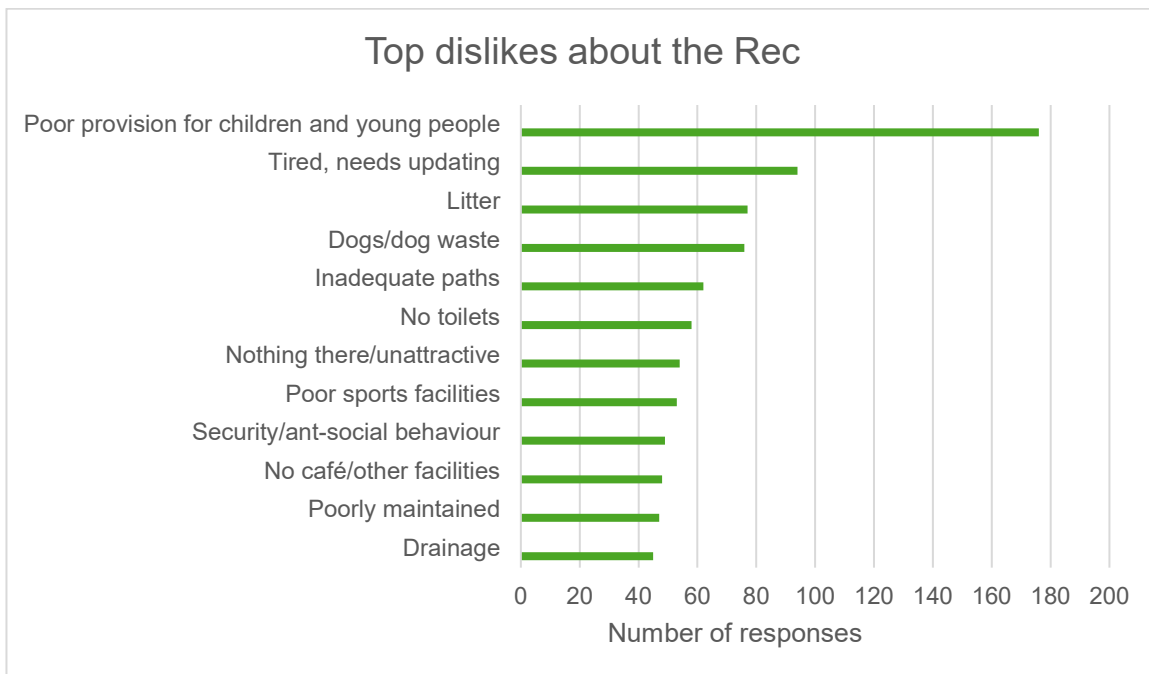


Figure 1 People visit the park for a range of activities.

2. In the young people's survey, top uses for the Rec were meeting friends, using the play area and leisure activities such as exercise or playing sports.
3. The Rec's biggest asset at the moment, according to participants, is the feeling it gives of being in a wide open space with views of the countryside. People also said they liked that it gave them convenient access between different parts of Merstham and from various entrances. Others enjoyed the sports and play facilities.



4. Participants were most critical of the current provision for children and young people, which they felt was inadequate and in a poor condition. They also felt the park was in general need of an update and that litter was a problem.



Residents were shown a list of facilities that the new park could include and were asked to choose their top 5. A new play area was the top choice. A pavilion with toilets, paths, wildlife area and football pitches were other popular choices. This will help the council plan what to deliver first.

Next steps

Based on the public consultation, community feedback and other research, RBBC plans to deliver a high quality and valued green space at the heart of the Merstham community, that will offer something for everyone. It will be a place to meet, socialise, play and be active and a place where people can enjoy access to nature.

The refurbished Merstham Recreation Ground will improve resident's quality of life including their health and wellbeing and will further strengthen Merstham as a place to live. Improvements will also seek to protect and enhance biodiversity, the natural environment and the floodplain.

The factors below emerged from the consultation and are being taken into account:

1. Consider kiosk/café for refreshments
2. Replace the proposed community room from the design to accommodate the facility for refreshments instead
3. Improving grass football pitches including the possible provision of junior pitches
4. Work with partners to reintroduce cricket to the park
5. Work with partners to develop plans for a 3G pitch, to be located outside of the Rec site
6. Planning on prioritising work to focus on completing the park components first (pavilion, new play, new paths and planting)
7. Continuing investigations into drainage
8. The council has carried out further work with local sports groups and clubs to assess what sports facilities could be delivered at the Rec.

What happens now?

Focus groups are being planned for early 2021. We plan to invite a cross section of around 15 to 20 people who expressed an interest, through the public survey, in being involved. These are likely to take place online.

RBBC will appoint a design team.

The design team will work with the council and residents to develop the design proposals in detail.

We will keep communicating with Merstham's wider community about the project.