

1.0 Summary Findings

The results presented are the findings of research conducted amongst residents of Guildford Borough between 4th September 2017 and 27th November 2017. In total 1968 residents participated in the research: 1559 that took part in the 'users' consultation and 409 that took part in the 'non-users' consultation. Surveys were conducted via face to face & telephone interviewing with a representative sample of Guildford residents; an online consultation promoted by the Parks and Countryside team and via a postal Guildford Borough Council Citizens' Panel survey.

1.1 Headline Findings

Both 'users' and 'non-users' strongly agree that Guildford is a 'better place to work and live' because of Stoke Park.

Attendance and awareness of GBC parks and green spaces in Guildford is high, as are overall satisfaction levels.

Parking and catering facilities were identified as the primary areas for change; parking is the most significant barrier to attending and toilet and catering facilities drawing the lowest levels of satisfaction.

Appetite for a greater level of community involvement is high.

Stoke Park is considered a family venue, community hub as well as a stage for local events and attractions. Providing facilities for children/ young people and sports clubs was particularly prevalent.

Over half wanted and improvement or investment in play areas (68%), catering facilities (60%) and car parks (55%). There is additional community support for investment in the areas of heritage, nature and wildlife and sports pitches.

Protecting, enhancing and marketing the heritage of Stoke Park is prevalent on residents' agenda.

1.2 Key Findings Summary

While the fledgling evidence base indicates visitors to Stoke Park recall a positive user experience, the research identifies a wider, positive contribution the park has on residents, as a **'better place to work and live'** as a consequence. The identity of Stoke Park as perceived by residents is an open/ green space for primarily children and young people and sports clubs; additionally it is considered a space for families and a stage for local events and activities.

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Residents displayed a level of buy-in to the park that suggests there is a genuine appetite to engage its development, supported by over 60% agreeing with community involvement in planning and running of the park and over a 25% seeking further involvement.

The caveat to this significant level of buy-in is the anticipated need to consider areas of development/ improvement raised by individuals/ communities. Parking (lack of space), facilities (specifically public toilets and catering) were prominent areas for development. The research also acknowledged the need to enhance its heritage elements, nature and wildlife, play areas and sports pitches.

The evidence indicating the need for investment should be considered with thoughtfulness; regarding public toilets, catering facilities and parking spaces, it suggests a level of dissatisfaction based on deficits in current provision. Regarding 'play areas' and sports pitches, dissatisfaction is not identified but instead that these are areas which are central to what many believe is the core function of Stoke Park. Similarly, 'heritage' and 'nature and wildlife' are not presented as areas of dissatisfaction but attracted a degree of support for investment, likely due to residents wishing to build the capacity of the park and improve their experience.

While the research is comprehensive and the sample of resident's representative, there is value in exploring further a number of areas. For example, while correlations and contradictions in the research can be interpreted, there are specific examples which, with a developed and specific evidence base could be used as a key driver to facilitate change. The correlation between 'non-users' perception of important facilities to a municipal park and recognising the potential deficits in Stoke Parks' facilities could be a tangible platform to make decisions; potentially increasing participation/ frequency, improving the user experience and/ or creating a more equitable standard across the Boroughs' parks and green spaces.

1.3 Executive Summary

This research has highlighted Stoke Park as a popular and well frequented open space at the heart of Guildford, both geographically and communally. Often described during the qualitative phase as 'the lungs of Guildford' it is apparent that this community hub plays a central role in the town, harbouring facilities from which many local groups function and flourish. Whilst it is evident that a sense of pride and preservation is shared by its users, there exists an appetite to develop individual aspects of the park but not at the expense of overdevelopment or commercialisation.

"Stoke Park was gifted to Guildford for the people to use a lung. There is a really nice atmosphere where dog walkers can come, people without gardens and people who want to play sports. If you haven't got much money, you go to Stoke Park and use the facilities. It is a resource for people of all backgrounds to enjoy."

Respondents who used the park were almost unanimous (94%) in agreement that Stoke Park makes Guildford a better place to live and work which is a powerful advocacy of the benefits that the park

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provides to the borough. Respondents were also in strong agreement that the park should be used for promoting health and wellbeing activities and (82%) and there should be a role for Stoke Park in protecting the environment (74%). This was echoed in the findings of people who were not frequent users of the park who also provided the greatest levels of agreement for these three benefits providing a strong indication as to the identity of Stoke Park.

In respect of visiting trends, around half of those respondents who considered themselves regular users of Stoke Park (defined as users throughout this summary) made a journey to the park once or twice a week. More frequent still, 1 in 5 said that they visited Stoke Park daily, meaning that around two-thirds of respondents are attracted to the park and its facilities at least once a week, highlighting how integral Stoke Park is to the borough's residents.

Respondents mainly travelled to Stoke Park by car or on foot with only a small proportion using public transport. The most frequently used parking facility was Guildford College, used by over a quarter of those who travelled by car. Slightly less (23%) said that they parked close by at Lido Road / bowls club / Wildwood indicating that a high volume of motorists use this western side of the site when arriving in car.

Respondents who travelled by car to Stoke Park were generally positive towards the condition, safety and security of parking facilities. However, they were less positive when considering the availability of parking spaces with 43% rating this aspect poor or very poor. This supports the notion that parking may be saturated around Guildford College and Lido Road / bowls club / Wildwood. When asked if managing Stoke Park, over half of respondents mentioned that they would improve/invest in this aspect compared a quarter who said they would increase the number and a fifth stated they would keep as is.

There was also evidence of parking issues in this area when speaking to stakeholders:

“Car parking is an issue around the bowling club as it has always been free – commuters are using the car parks and walk through the park together with college students. To improve the park – they need to improve access to the park which needs to be controlled.”

This is perhaps indicative that parking issues could be solved through management rather than development.

Children and young people feature prominently when assessing the role of Stoke Park with around half of respondents that said that they tend to visit Stoke Park with children. The vast majority (92%) of users agreed that an 'area for children and young people to play' describes the role of Stoke Park, a higher level of agreement than for any other aspect, concluding that children, young people and play facilities are an important factor in the development of the park.

Two thirds of users were found to be satisfied with the current play areas at the park with just 1 in 10 expressing dissatisfaction. Around a third of respondents decided that there is a need for a further play area in Stoke Park; the most frequently specified location being near the skate park,

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suggesting that age specific facilities for children and young people may be more desirable to families with children of different ages.

Despite positive levels of satisfaction towards current play facilities, it was clear that users were keen for the play area to evolve at Stoke Park. Over two thirds said that they would improve / invest in the play area if they were managing the park. Around a quarter called for the play areas to be increased and only 1 in 10 users thought that the play area should be kept as it is. A popular action specified by users when considering the development of play facilities was to update and modernise equipment. In general, nevertheless, the play facilities at Stoke Park are deemed as more than satisfactory, a sentiment echoed by stakeholders:

“The park has a nice playground; it’s all pretty good really. I like a big open space.”
“Paddling pool is fantastic as is the skate board park. All the play equipment is in one place, its great and my kids have used it a lot of the years.”

Over half of users said that they typically stay in Stoke Park for over an hour and up to 5 hours or more, which indicates the need for suitable provision of facilities such as toilets, refreshments and seating. When asked how satisfied or dissatisfied with a range of the facilities at the park, over a quarter of users expressed dissatisfaction with toilet facilities, higher than for any other aspect. There were two further notable instances of dissatisfaction with facilities with 1 in 5 stating that catering and picnic/seating facilities were in need of improvement, thus providing a clear steer for development of provisions.

Throughout both the qualitative and quantitative fieldwork, respondents indicated a desire to improve catering facilities on the park with only a third of users satisfied with the current offerings. This was further supported by the fact that 8 out of 10 users felt that catering facilities should be improved, invested or increased in Stoke Park. Of those users who specified a lack of facilities as a reason why they do not visit Stoke Park more frequently almost half said that café facilities should be improved. Anecdotally, current facilities were described as basic and that improvements would be a sound investment on the part of the Parks and Countryside team:

“The kiosk they have in Stoke gardens is quite basic – you just get a basic Nescafé. If you want to go on a cold winter’s day – there is no cover. There is no café nearby and they are in the town. I think that this is an area for improvement.”

“Catering wise they are missing a trick, not a lot here and when you have all these parents watching sports and standing around, they could and would spend money on coffees etc.”

Another important role that Stoke Park performs is that of a hub for organised sports clubs, providing health and wellbeing benefits to the local community. 82% agreed that the role of Stoke Park was to provide facilities for organised sport with around 1 in 5 confirming that they belonged to a club that uses the parks facilities. Over a third of this cohort said they were associated with the

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rugby club and a fifth said that they were members of the bowling club and Park Run. In total, 28 different clubs were mentioned by respondents. When speaking to stakeholders, including those involved directly in the running of such organisations, gaps emerged in the cohesion of clubs based at Stoke Park. It was found that there is little communication between stakeholders and a desire to set up forums in which organisations to work out how to work better together.

“There is no formal network amongst groups who use the park but we just know who’s who but it would be good to have one.”

Communication seems to be the first step in relation to organised sport. There was a feeling that organised events such as the Park Run is growing and compromises between organisations may need to be found in aspects such as parking, ground conditions and facilities.

“I do not receive any communications from the park and I know the Park Run team get frustrated around the lack of notice in terms of cancellations. Needs single ownership / point of contact, this would help improve communications and understanding.”

When considering development of sports facilities, 96% of respondents indicated that they would like to see grass sports pitches improved, invested or increased and 85% advocating the improvement or expansion of artificial features. There was a strong perception, when speaking to stakeholders that there are wider benefits to health and wellbeing in Guildford and the surrounding area which should drive the relationship between Stoke Park and organised sports.

When examining Stoke Park as an events space, it was found that the Fireworks Fiesta and the County Show drew more visitors than any other event and activity. The now defunct Guilfest was mentioned throughout the qualitative phase of the research and it was apparent that an event of a similar nature would be welcome on the park. This is supported by 78% of users who said that would attend music events in Stoke Park – albeit free of charge. Slightly less, (68%) said that they would be willing to pay for such an event. Stakeholders highlighted the challenges of such events, including parking, litter and affects to the ground conditions.

“Post event management is very good, it always a quick turnaround. Can get very muddy and dug up during an event but they always have it looking great again very quickly.”

“There could be more festivals on the park now that Guilfest has stopped.”

“It was sad that Guilfest ended as that was really good to have in the park”

Whilst 8 out of 10 users said that they visited Stoke Park more than any other park, open space or public gardens, it was clear that the most popular alternative was RHS Wisley, north east of the borough. Amongst those who considered themselves non or infrequent users of Stoke Park (visiting less than once a month) RHS Wisley was again, by far the most popular open space. Although no comparisons were made between the two sites during this research, it may be of use to explore this finding in the future.

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Over 6 in every 10 respondents said that local communities should be more involved in the planning and running of the park. This was supported by the fact that when asked what they would do if they ran the park over 40% said they would increase community involvement, a third said they would improve it and just a quarter would keep it as it is. This highlights the perceived scope for improvement and better utilisation of the park and how it supports the local community.

This research has provided an unprecedented wealth of representative quantitative data together with rich qualitative feedback and will provide guidance in the development of this much loved resource at the heart of Guildford. There are high levels of satisfaction throughout the report towards all aspects of the park and some strong steers on how residents may want to interact with the park and see it evolve. There is a sense that the park should not be subject to overdevelopment, retaining its function as an undulating open space, yet there are opportunities for improvement to facilities, cohesion, communication and management.

"I think we have the balance is right. I would see it underdeveloped rather than overdeveloped. It is a lung for Guildford."

"I just wouldn't change it at all (the park). It's just a lovely green space that's quite undulating. It has some lovely trees in it that look great at this time of year. It's a lovely open space that makes you feel that it is not in a town centre."

4.1 User Profile

Key Findings	64% visited Stoke Park at least weekly
	Around two-thirds (66%) said it was their primary reason for travelling
	68% spent between 30 minutes and 2 hours at the park
	The children's playground/park and paddling/splash pool were the main reasons given for visiting the park
	Over three-quarters (79%) visit Stoke Park more than any other park or open space
	Nearly half (47%) visit the park with children
	Most people travel to the park by car (50%) or by walking (49%)

4.2 Non Users Profile

Key Findings	Over half (53%) visited Stoke Park once every six months. 14% had never visited the park.
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	Around three-quarters (74%) had visited a park or open space other than Stoke park in the last year
	Over a quarter (27%) visited RHS Wisley
	The majority (85%) were satisfied with parks and spaces provided by Guildford Borough Council

4.3 Car Parking

Key Findings	Half rely on a car to travel to Stoke Park
	Around a quarter park at Guildford College (28%) or at Lido Road car park / bowls club / Wildwood (23%)
	43% felt the availability of parking spaces was poor or very poor
	Over half (55%) wanted to see an improvement or investment in car parks; a quarter wanted an increased number of car parks
Contradictions & correlations	43% said the availability of parking spaces was poor but only 25% wanted an increased number of car parks
	Both the survey and the in-depth interviews identified the lack of available car parking as an issue
	Lack of parking was the main reason given (17%) as to why users don't use Stoke Park more frequently
	86% of non-users and 83% of users felt car parking facilities were important when visiting a park or open space
Questions to be explored	Why do only a quarter want an increased number of car parks when 43% mentioned dissatisfaction with the availability of parking spaces?
	Lack of spaces was frequently mentioned by respondents. Where would they like to see these extra spaces? Would they rather expand a current car park or build a new one? If so where?

4.4 Catering

Key Findings	Just over a third (35%) were satisfied with the catering facilities at Stoke Park
	Three-fifths said they would improve or invest in catering facilities

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	A covered seating area and facilities open all year (both 73%) were seen as the main features that would encourage use of catering facilities
Contradictions & correlations	A high proportion (60%) wanted investments or improvements to catering facilities, which supports the low proportion (35%) that were satisfied with the current catering facilities
	Of those that said a lack of facilities prevented them visiting the park, half (49%) said an improved café was lacking
	Both the survey and the in-depth interviews indicated a need for improved catering facilities
Questions to be explored	What level of investment would be necessary to improve the current catering facilities to a level whereby people are satisfied with them?

4.5 Play

Key Findings	The vast majority (97%) felt that Stoke Parks role should incorporate areas for children and young people to play
	71% said a playground was important when visiting a park or open space; 43% said it was very important
	Two-thirds (66%) were satisfied with the play areas at the park
	Over a third (34%) felt there was a need for further play areas
	Over two-thirds (68%) said they would improve or invest in play areas at Stoke Park
	Nearly nine out of ten non-users (87%) were aware of the children's playground
Contradictions & correlations	34% felt there was a need for further play areas whereas only 23% said they would increase the number of play areas
	Although a third felt the need for further play areas during in-depth interviews it was thought the play areas were adequate
	Despite two-thirds (66%) being satisfied with the play areas at the park, slightly more (68%) said they would improve or invest in play areas
Questions to be explored	With a high proportion being satisfied with the play areas, why was it felt there was such a need for investment in this aspect?

	Why did the research suggest a need for improvement and investment in play areas and the in-depth interviews suggest that the play areas were adequate, but just condensed in one area of the park?
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4.6 Facilities

Key Findings	Around a fifth (17%) said that lack of parking prevents them from using Stoke Park more frequently; 9% said distance and lack of facilities
	Half (49%) said an improved café was the facility the park was lacking
	Higher levels of satisfaction was expressed towards the paddling pool (77%) and play area (66%)
	Respondents showed higher levels of dissatisfaction towards toilet facilities (27%), catering (23%) and picnic/seating facilities (20%)
	Non-users placed high levels of importance on toilets, car parking and picnic/seating facilities when visiting parks and open spaces
Contradictions & correlations	Lack of parking and the need for improved catering facilities were mentioned as reasons that prevent more frequent use of the park, both of which were mentioned as areas for improvement throughout the survey
	Facilities that non-users felt were important when visiting parks (toilets, catering, car parking) were consistently seen as areas for improvements amongst users of Stoke Park
Questions to be explored	Is the reason why non-users aren't visiting the park because they are aware that facilities they value (toilets, catering, car parking) are not up to their standards?

4.7 Sports

Key Findings	82% felt the role of Stoke Park was to provide facilities for organised sport
	A fifth (19%) belonged to a club using the park's facilities
	Over half were satisfied with the range of sports & clubs, the sports pitches/greens and tennis courts
	Most wanted an increased number of grass sports pitches (60%) and artificial sports pitches (47%)

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<p>Contradictions & correlations</p>	<p>Despite 62% being satisfied with the sports pitches at Stoke Park only 4% would keep grass sports pitches as they are and 15% would keep artificial sports pitches as they are. Most favoured an increased number of sports pitches</p>
<p>Questions to be explored</p>	<p>Why is satisfaction with the sports/pitches greens at 62%, yet 60% want to see an increased number of sports pitches?</p>
	<p>Is there a demand for any particular type of sports pitches (football, rugby, hockey, bowls, etc.)?</p>
	<p>Where in Stoke Park would any additional sports pitches be located?</p>
	<p>Would an increased amount of sports pitches need to be supported by increased investment in facilities to support them such as changing rooms, car parking and refreshments?</p>

4.8 Accessibility

<p>Key Findings</p>	<p>Lack of parking (17%), distance (9%) and lack of facilities (9%) were the main reasons that prevent people using the park more frequently</p>
	<p>Only 39% were satisfied with the promotion and marketing of Stoke Park</p>
	<p>A third felt the need for improvements or investment in paths and access; half wanted an increased number</p>
	<p>Around a fifth (22%) of non-users were aware that Stoke Park holds a green flag award; half said this would encourage them to visit</p>
<p>Contradictions & correlations</p>	<p>Lack of parking was seen as the main reason preventing people visiting more frequently; 43% had previously said the availability of parking spaces was poor or very poor</p>
	<p>Awareness of the Green Flag Award was low amongst non-users (22%) which is unsurprising when only 39% of users were satisfied with the promotion and marketing of Stoke Park</p>
	<p>16% of non-users mentioned car-parking stops them using Stoke Park more frequently and that more available spaces (24%) would encourage them to use Stoke Park in the future. This again echoes the sentiment from users that there is a lack of available parking at the park</p>

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Questions to be explored	What more could be done to raise awareness of the Green Flag Award Stoke Park holds as half of non-users said knowing this would encourage them to visit the park?
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4.9 Heritage

Key Findings	Three-fifths (63%) said it would be helpful and interesting to have more information on the history of Stoke Park
	A third (34%) said they would improve or invest in heritage features, half (47%) said they would increase the number of heritage features
	Four-fifths (79%) felt it was important that heritage features are protected and enhanced
Contradictions & correlations	Despite 79% that said it was important heritage features are protected and enhanced, only a third (34%) said they would improve or invest in heritage features
Questions to be explored	Why is there so little interest in improving or investing in heritage facilities when four-fifths said it was important these features are protected and enhanced?
	Around half wanted to increase the number of heritage features, what heritage features would they want increasing and where should they be located?

4.10 Nature and Wildlife

Key Findings	Over half (57%) said the role of Stoke Park should incorporate areas for wildlife and nature
	58% were satisfied with wildlife friendly areas
	Three-fifths (59%) felt there should be more areas for wildlife
	35% wanted improvement/investment in tree planting, 40% wanted an increased number
	43% wanted improvement/investment nature and wildlife, 37% wanted an increased number
Contradictions & correlations	Despite three-fifths (59%) that said there should be more areas for wildlife, only 37% said they would increase the number of nature and wildlife areas

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	Non-users (71%) were more than a tenth more likely to say there should be more areas for wildlife than users of the park (59%)
Questions to be explored	Why is there a disparity in those that would increase the number of nature and wildlife areas and those that said there should be more areas for wildlife?

4.11 Events and Activities

Key Findings	Three-quarters (77%) felt Stoke Park should be used as an area for events and activities
	Fireworks Fiesta (42%), Surrey County Show (39%) and Park Run (28%) were the most attended events and activities
	Less than half (44%) thought there should be more events and activities
	36% wanted improvements/investments in events & event programming, 42% wanted an increased number
	Respondents were more likely to attend outdoor theatre/cinema/large screen and small/informal/free music events (both 78%)
Contradictions & correlations	Non-users (51%) were more likely than users to (44%) say there should be more events and activities
Questions to be explored	What events and activities would attract not users to Stoke Park that do not already take place?

4.12 Community Involvement

Key Findings	Three-fifths (61%) agreed local communities should be more involved in the planning and running of Stoke Park
	44% said they would increase community involvement, 30% would improve or invest in it
	Over a quarter (26%) wanted to be further involved with Stoke Park
Contradictions & correlations	Despite the 61% that agreed local communities should be more involved in the planning and running of Stoke Park, 44% that said they would increase community involvement and 30% that would improve or invest in it only 26% said that they would actually want to be further involved with Stoke Park

Questions to be explored	Why do so few want to be involved further with Stoke Park despite 61% that agreed communities should be more involved in the planning and running of the park?
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4.13 The Role of Stoke Park Now and in to the Future

Key Findings	The vast majority (94%) of users felt Stoke Park makes Guildford a better place to live and work. 87% of non-users said it makes Guildford a better place
	Over nine-tenths felt the role of Stoke Park was as an area for young people to play (97%) and as an informal area for exercise (94%)
	Over three-quarters (76%) were aware of the woodlands and the walled garden
	Less than half were aware of the Japanese garden (45%), veteran parkland trees (43%), Memory Meadow (36%), WW2 tank trap defences (34%), model farm (21%) and Stoke Park Friends Group (13%)
	Over half wanted and improvement or investment in play areas (68%), catering facilities (60%) and car parks (55%)
	Three-fifths wanted an increased number of grass sports pitches
	Non-users showed low levels of awareness of heritage facilities (28%) and netball (23%)
Contradictions & correlations	Both users and non-users were in agreement that Stoke Park makes Guildford a better place
	Non-users were a fifth more likely to feel the quality and maintenance of the planting and gardens should be increased
	Nearly all (98%) non-users felt the standard of maintenance was important when visiting a park, however 44% felt this is something that could be improved upon at Stoke Park
	The non-users that were familiar with Stoke Park mentioned good maintenance/clean, improve parking and improve catering as improvements/investments they would like to see. Parking and catering were also seen as areas for improvement amongst users
Questions to be explored	Would increasing the quality and maintenance of the planting and gardens encourage some of the non-users to visit the park?

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	Would improving parking and catering facilities encourage non-users to visit the park?
	Would higher awareness of facilities at Stoke Park encourage people to either visit or visit more frequently?