

A photograph of a park landscape. In the foreground, there is a field of tall, green grass with several small yellow flowers. In the middle ground, a path winds through a grassy area. A large, mature tree with dense green foliage stands prominently on the left side. The background shows more trees and a clear blue sky.

# Highbury Park Visitors Survey

## March 2019

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## Introduction

This document presents the findings of the updated visitor's survey that was undertaken at Highbury Park, Birmingham. The survey was conducted in the month of March 2019. The purpose of the survey was to help gather information on the origin, profile, behaviour and satisfaction of the visitors to Highbury Park. The survey also aimed to explore the views on the strengths and weaknesses of Highbury Park as a visitor destination, and to evaluate opinions on specific aspects of the visitor's experience.

This survey is vital for the stakeholders in understanding the visitor's thoughts and opinions towards the park. Highbury Park's last survey was carried out three years ago in 2016, therefore it was essential to update this as the park had gone through numerous changes since then.

## Background

Highbury Park is situated in the Mosley area of King's Heath four miles from the centre of Birmingham, at a place called Moor Green.

The Highbury estate was the 'rus in urbe' estate of the Chamberlain's from 1879 to 1914, when the idea of bringing the countryside into the town was popular amongst wealthy families. It was named after the London suburb where Joseph Chamberlain grew up. The gardens are also of great historical importance and a great asset to Birmingham. The fame of Highbury was due to the fact that within thirty acres of land there were many different features and habitats which contributed to the feel of being in the country on a large estate rather than the suburbs of a major industrial city. The habitats include;

- Broadleaved Woodland
- Wetland habitats including ponds, streams and reed beds.
- Ancient hedgerow
- Marshland
- Ornamental planting
- Scrub
- Coniferous trees

The range of habitats supports a wide range of wildlife. The wildlife value is further enhanced by the network of greenspaces which it forms part of.

## Research Objectives

The objectives for the visitor survey were as follows:

- i) To provide up to date on the profile, origin, behaviour, use of park and opinions of the visitors of Highbury Park in order to help improve understanding of the visitors and their use of the park.
- ii) To identify the characteristics of visits, in order to better understand why specific visitor types, come to the park, their perceptions of the park and particular likes and dislikes.

## Survey methodology

In order to meet the objectives listed above, a survey involving face-to-face interviews with a random sample of visitors was carried out at a selected location in the park. The location chosen was an intersection near the main entrance which had visitors passing through from all directions. The application used was Survey Monkey, allowing the interviews to be quick and effective.

In all, 62 people were stopped and were willing to complete the interview.

## Statistically reliability

All sample surveys that are carried out are subject to statistical error that varies with the sample size. Table 1 shows the margins within which one can be 95% certain that the true figures will lie (based on the sample being randomly selected)

*Table 1: Confidence limit*

		All Visitors
Result	Sample	52
10% or 90%	+/-	3.0%
20% or 80%	+/-	3.9%
30% or 70%	+/-	4.5%
40% or 60%	+/-	4.8%
50%	+/-	4.9%

The figures are at the 95% confidence limit. This means, for example, that we can be 95% certain that, if 50% of 'all visitors' surveyed are found to have particular characteristics or views, there is an estimated 95% chance that the true population lies within the range of +/- 4.9% (i.e between 45.1% and 54.9%). The margins of error shown above should be kept in mind when interpreting the results contained in this report.

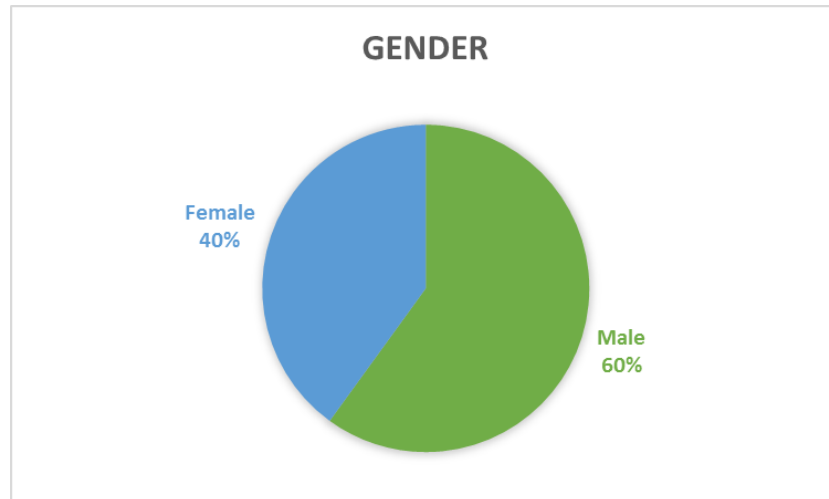
Where a figure of 0% is shown in any table of results, it represents a value of less than 0.5%.

## Results

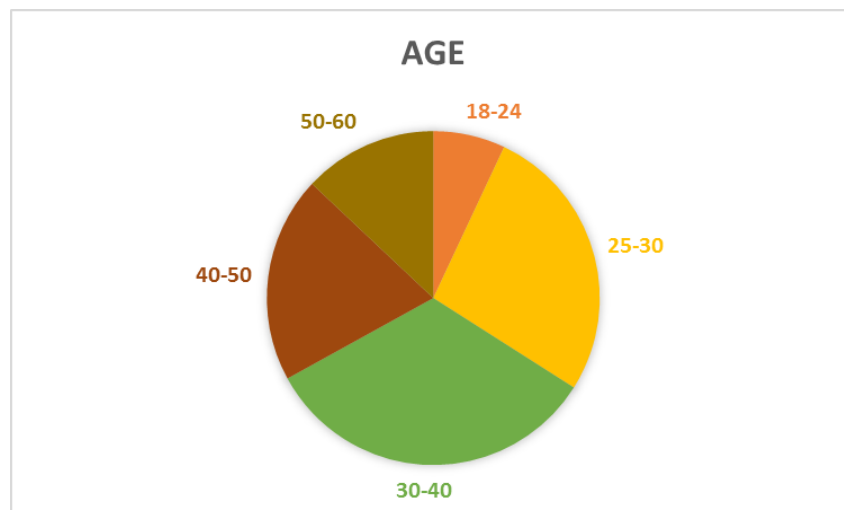
These findings include visitor profiles, satisfaction, frequency of visitation and more.

### Visitor profile

*Figure 1 showing Gender percentages of Highbury Park Visitors.*



*Figure 2 showing Age percentages of Highbury Park visitors.*



Gender and age were estimated when speaking to the visitors, therefore the results for these will be subjective to the interviewee.

From the results we can see that the largest age group to visit the park was between the ages of 30-40 (33%), followed by 25-30 (27%). The age group of 18-24 was the lowest (7%).

## Visitor Satisfaction

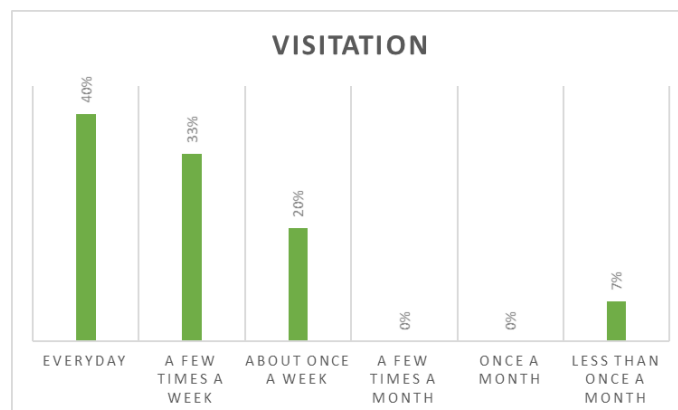
*Figure 3 showing visitors Satisfaction*



From the results we can see that the large majority of the visitors that were interviewed were either very satisfied (47%) or satisfied (47%) with the park, with only 7% being neither satisfied nor dissatisfied. There were no visitors interviewed that found the park and their experience to be dissatisfied or very dissatisfied.

## Frequency of Visitation

*Figure 4 showing Frequency of visitation by those interviewed*



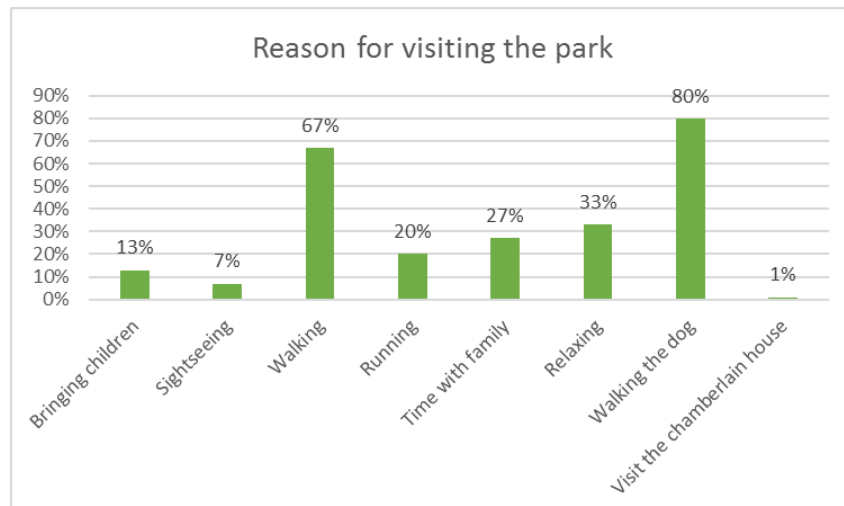
The results indicated that the large majority of the visitors were people living in the direct area near Highbury Park, as around 40% said they visited the park every day. Around 33% of the visitors said they visited the park a few times a week, and 20% said they visited the park about once a week.



Only 7% said they visited the park less than once a month.

### Reason for people visiting Highbury Park

*Figure 5 showing the Reasons for people visiting the park*

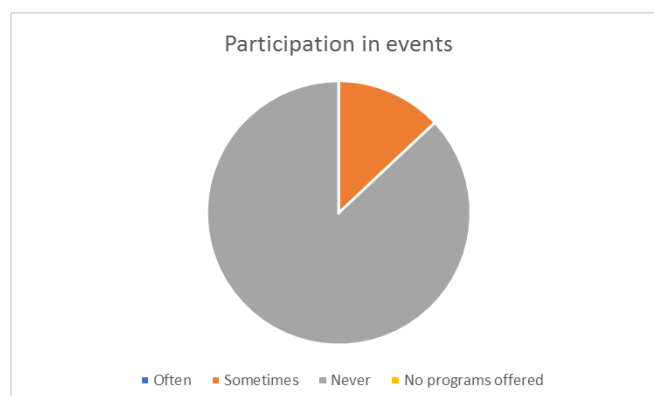


The results indicated that the main reason for visitation to the park was to walk the dog (80%). Followed behind by 67% of visitors enjoying walking and 33% to come and relax.

Around 20% of visors use the park to run in, whilst 27% use the park to spend time with family and 13% use the park to bring their children to play. Events and volunteering were found to bring 0% of people to the park that were interviewed, possible reasons for this will be discussed later in the report.

### Participation in events

*Figure 6 showing visitors Participation at Highbury events*



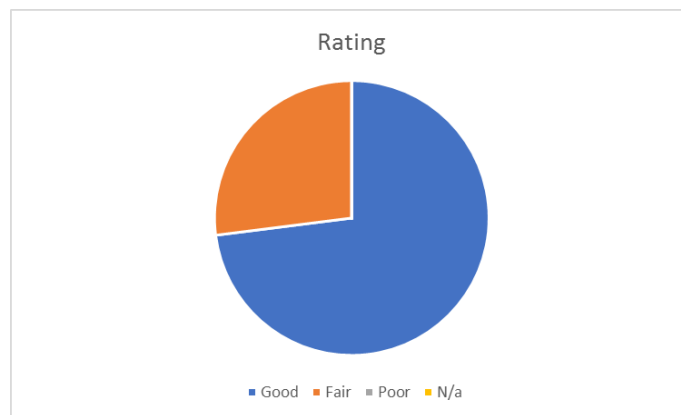
The question asked to the visitors was whether ‘you or your children have ever participated in the events held by Highbury?’ A shocking 87% of visitors said they had never partaken in any events, whilst 13% had sometimes participated. The results showed the 0% of the visitors participated in the events offered often.

From the 13% of visitors that said they had gone to some events, their answers included Chamberlain House Events, Highbury Hall Digbeth dining club and activities that are held for the children.

Again, possible reasons for these results will be discussed later and possible avenues to improve these results and increase visitor participation will be recommended.

### Rating of the Park

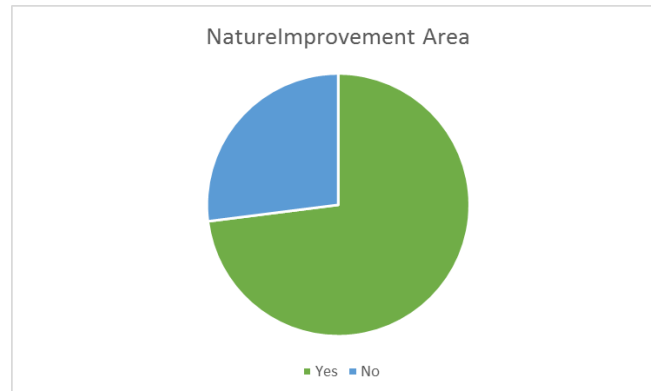
*Figure 7 showing the Ratings of the condition of the Park*



The results showed that the large majority of the visitors found the condition of the park to be good (this included overall aesthetic of the park including the amount of litter) (73%) and fair (27%). There were no (0%) visitors that found the condition of the park to be poor.

## Nature Improvement Area

*Figure 8 showing knowledge on the Nature improvement Area*



A large majority of the visitors knew about the Nature Improvement Area (need to go into more detail on what this is later on in the report) (73%) whilst only 27% of people didn't know or wrongly located the Nature Improvement Area.

## Feedback

The visitors were asked 'If you could improve one aspect of the park, what would it be?'

14% of those questioned answered along the lines of 'Nothing, I think it's really good'.

21% of the visitors said they would like to see the park have a couple of things to attract children, such as swings or an adventure area.

The remaining responses were marked as miscellaneous and are listed below:

- Not enough bins
- Not enough signage
- Drainage by the pond
- Litter
- Inadequate parking
- No new planting
- Toilets as a possibility
- Include a coffee shop

## Discussion and Conclusions

### Visitor Profile

One of the main aims highlighted in the Chamberlain Management Plan, was to bring a variety of ages and cultures to the park. From the results we can see that one of the lowest groups was 18-25 at 7% of visitors stopped to be interviewed. Attracting a young adult age group could be achieved through some of these recommendations.

### Interactive Art to attract young adults and deter vandalism

Young people are drawn to interactive spaces (Growing up boulder, 2015). They want spaces where they can create art, such as a graffiti wall, mural wall or inspirational chalk board. One of the issues that has arisen in the past is the graffiti on the wall near the main entrance of Highbury, so a possible way to combat this is to have another wall or board designated where teens can freely create art and will be less likely to graffiti on important features of the park. A successful example of this is the Oxford Canal Mural Project on the Oxford Bridge. This 'free wall' is one of many in the city of Oxford that have helped to combat vandalism and the community have all appreciated the beautiful art from the local artists that has been created. It

is also an opportunity for the park stakeholders to solicit the local schools to paint a mural each year.

Anti-graffiti coating (also known as Barrier coatings) is a permanent coating that is painted on a clean surface which allows for future graffiti removal to be much easier. Paints such as Fluor carbonates that are non-stick/mark, can be used on many different surfaces, including targeted graffiti hotspots within the park. However, it is important to note that once this coating has been placed, it will permanently alter the surface.

### Study Spaces

Young adults have repeatedly said they would like areas to come and relax and study on tables to work in groups. Wi-Fi could be an option to allow for not only young teens but all ages to access music and other media with their phones. Simple picnic tables can allow for visitors to do work in a peaceful outdoor environment (Harris, 2017).

### **Frequency of visitation**

From the results we can see that the large majority of visitors come to the park on a daily basis (40%). This proportion of the visitors interviewed were people who lived in the direct areas around Highbury Park. Only 7% said they visited the park less than once a month with 0% saying they visited the park about once a week. These visitors were people that were either visiting family and friends near the park or visiting on a one-off basis.

We can recommend trying to increase these visitors that are not from the direct area, possibly outside of Birmingham. One of the main aims of the Management Statement was ‘To achieve high levels of visitor satisfaction and visitor numbers, with a diverse visitor profile’. Possible recommendation includes;

1. Improve the Highbury park Website

Many of the people interviewed fed back that their experience on the website was confusing and very out of date. It may be beneficial to look at making the website more visibly appealing as well as easier to navigate. Austin (2017) has several ideas on how to improve your websites, including staying mobile friendly and making clear navigations for your site. Making the website into an application as Austin suggests may be beneficial. It will not only make access to the site easier but may attract a younger crowd of visitors.

The website/app could also include pictures to help identify the different flora and fauna found in the park, as one visitor did mention that the website needs to have more information (or possibly make it more obvious to site visitors on where they can find this information).

2. Look at expanding onto social Medias, such as Instagram, Twitter, Facebook and YouTube.

This would be a great idea to reach exterior visitors. A great example of a Garden that has started using social media is Winterbourne Gardens. It allows people to share their images on Instagram and share their experiences on Facebook and Twitter, which can reach family, friends and followers and urge them to visit. This could be set up by a future School or University Student looking to do Placement at Highbury. It is simple, quick and free. To take it a step further, it is a chance to possibly do fun activities such as ‘Best Instagram pictures’ where people can tag Highbury Park and win vouchers as an incentive. In Hay’s (2012) findings when looking into the impact using social media has on organisations and communities is that they could’ benefit from becoming even more innovative and creative when it comes to their social media strategies’. It is therefore import for this to be considered in the Highbury Management Plan.

3. Look into making the park a ‘day out’ by including a café or toilets so visitors can spend the day there.

An example of a great day out is Winterbourne, Edgbaston, it is a great day out where you can walk around the gardens and appreciate the outdoors, whilst also relaxing in the tea room with your friends, family or studying with your friends. It may be a good idea to invest in making an area for teas and coffees, possibly in one of the rooms in the Chamberlain House or an exterior building.

### **Reasons for visitation**

Most visitors (80%) came to Highbury Park to walk their dog. This was closely followed behind by 67% of visitors enjoying walking and 33% to come and relax.

Around 27% of the visitors use the park to spend time with family and 13% use the park to bring their children to play. From the feedback the visitors gave, it was noted that many parents would be more likely to bring their children if there was an area for them to play in, such as a ‘kid’s adventure area’.

### Adventure Area

An adventure area may be beneficial, especially if the park is looking to increase and broaden the age range of visitors. Many of the visitors interviewed said they would be much more likely to take their children to Kings Heath Park or Cannon Hill over Highbury since it had an area for the children to play.

When speaking to the stakeholders, one of the attractions of Highbury is its very natural look, therefore bringing in an adventure area for children may disrupt this ‘natural’ appearance. Vandalism may also be an issue and will be discussed with recommendations as to the best plan of action to protect the adventure area.

Natural Play areas could be one solution to the not so attractive classic Children’s play areas. It incorporates wood, trees, ropes and more. Stoecklin (2009) stated that ‘Children find beauty in wildness, so Natural Play Areas should provide that, along with openness, diversity and opportunities for manipulation, exploration and experimentation. Children value unmanicured places and the adventure and mystery of hiding places and wild, spacious, uneven areas. They also appreciate animals, creatures in ponds, and other living things, as well as different levels and nooks and crannies, and places that provide shelter, shade, privacy and views.’

Activities could include Climbing (up rocks, boulders, trees or ladders), Sliding (down hills), Swinging (on ropes, tires or pillars), Balancing (on beams), and Hiding (in leaves, behind trees).

Below are some examples of some great natural play areas at National Trust Parks that have been highly successful and have a great natural aesthetic:

*Figure 9 shows Claverton Down National Trust Park swings:*



*Figure 10 shows Dunstable Down National trust wooden pillars:*



These Natural play areas would be cheap and easy to acquire, as the pillars could be made out trees that have been cut down by the rangers.

### **Other issues**

Signage is another issue that arose when speaking to the visitors. Many wanted to see more signage for the different trees to be able to identify them. Another reason signage would be beneficial is for the promotion of events, activities or works by the rangers taking place within the park.

The Nature Improvement Area was known by 73% of the interviewers asked, however it should be noted that many of these visitors seemed unsure, as many would have to ask after if that was the right area. They were also unsure as to the reason for the NIA was. I believe that by adding more signage across the park on what the Nature Improvement Area is and what it is there for would be beneficial and allow for more visitors to get involved (National Archives, 2013).

A good park signage system allows for multiple functions such as; providing effective information; encourages learning experiences; helps maintain the image of the park; communicates park rules and other works taking place by the rangers.



### Educational signs

Educational signs which point out specific trees, paths, flowers or other elements of the natural environment can be a fun way to engage people in interacting with the natural environment.

An example of an interactive but natural educational sign can be seen below:



*Figure 11: Image from Natural heritage*

### Informational signs

Information boards and the updated bulletin board. Often, visitors are familiar with the one or more sections of a park that they frequent and are not familiar with the breadth of the park and its facilities. Additionally, visitors are often uninformed about park events and activities, renovations and management plans (Project for Public spaces, 2008). These informational signs and boards can serve as a tool to better inform visitors about the park.

### No new planting

Many visitors complained about how they could see a number of trees being cut but not replaced. Throughout the placement we were planting numerous new trees and it would be beneficial to make this more obvious to the public by posting on the informational board and posting on social media (whether posting it on Facebook or Instagram with a picture). Also, the SellmyGroup website states that ‘branding is an extension of your business, it reflects your image and communicates to your target audience’, showing just how important signage is in and around the park.

## Limitations

### Interviewer Bias

Salazar (1990) looked into how interviewer bias affected survey research, as well as other limitations inherent to the interview process.

Salazar (1990) explains how interviewer bias affects the process, stating that ‘personal qualities of the interviewer generally acknowledged to be the key determinants of the outcome of the interview. Biases introduced by the interviewer can directly affect the validity and reliability of the ultimate findings of the study’. Relating this back to the interview at Highbury, it may be possible that the people being interviewed by me would be less likely to state their true opinions with the fear of being judged by someone that is part of the park. This is also called ‘Social desirability’ where, in certain situations, those interviewed may distort the information they give to present what they believe as a more favourable impression.

### Time of day of month.

The interview was held over two days, Wednesday and Saturday, to have the greatest scope of visitors possible. It was also held from 8am to 6pm to also cover as many visitors as possible. It could be possible that the weather, time of month or time of the day could have affected the number and type of visitors that come to the park, therefore it is important to consider this when looking over the results.

## Conclusions

To conclude, the overall responses from the visitors was very positive, however there were a few areas of concern that could be easily tackled and allow for an increase in visitors and variety of ages and cultures. The main areas of concern that were discussed in this report included; Increasing the number of young people; creating an ‘natural’ adventure area for children; tackling vandalism; and making Highbury Park an area people can spend the whole day in.

This is not an exhaustive list, however based on what I observed at the park during my placement and interviews, these are my top areas to focus on.

The attention should be on looking to repeat the visitor's surveys more often, possibly throughout the different seasons, to gauge a better understanding of visitor profiles and behaviour.

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