

Friendly Parks for Young and Old: Barnes Green Consultation

September 2016

We are working to make Barnes Green a Dementia Friendly Park and sought the views of people with dementia, their carers, family and friends about their experience of using the park, the barriers that they face and what can be done to improve the park to make it more accessible for them.

Following initial discussions with a local dementia group on what improvements would be beneficial the key areas to focus on were considered to be:

- Entrances / exits
- Footpath improvements
- Access to ponds
- Interpretation and way finding
- Definition of different areas of the park
- Benches and resting places

We were also interested in what the barriers there are to the use Barnes Green for this group, what additional support was required to make it possible to use the park and what types of activity they are interested in taking part in. The decision was taken to include people with dementia in the consultation so that their opinions were reflected and any barriers to making use of parks could be explored in detail with them. It was considered unlikely that they would make use of the internet so we used discussion groups as a means of consulting.

The consultation ran from 30th August to 25th September and took the form of:

- An online questionnaire aimed at people with dementia, their family and carers
- A more general consultation which asked for comments on the proposals to upgrade park facilities on Barnes Green, this included an activity held on the Green at the launch of the consultation.
- Written questionnaires distributed to organisations who have clients who may not have access to the internet – Age UK in Barnes, FiSH, Barnes Business Association, Grove Road GP Surgery, Richmond Carers Centre.
- Discussions with 3 support groups for people with dementia. These discussions had a structure relating closely to the online / written consultation
- Feedback to a presentation made to the Retro Café for people with dementia and their carers run by FiSH in Barnes,
- The proposals were also discussed at Grove Road GP Surgery Patient Participation Association who recorded their support of the development of a dementia friendly park in Barnes in the minutes of their meeting.

There was a total of 4 responses to the online consultation and a total of 13 written responses some of these were contributions from groups of people with dementia rather than individuals. The discussion groups involved 32 people in all and were made up of people with dementia, the support group leaders and volunteers who assist the groups. General discussions were also held with 12 people on Barnes Green on 30th August.

Conclusions

The consultation found that all those who took part in both written and informal discussion groups were supportive of developing Barnes Green as a Friendly Park. Some people who took part said that they already make use of the park and enjoy the experience. Others in the discussion groups do not make use of the park but most are interested in any future opportunities available to make use of the open space. Three gentlemen said that they had no interest in visiting the park. One does visit Richmond Park but, although he enjoys the experience, said that he does not get out of the car.

From the consultation it is clear that the main issues that should be addressed to make the park “Friendly” are to provide adequate walking surfaces and plenty of opportunities for taking a rest. Making the park more accessible by improving information about transport links and disabled parking bays is also crucial. One carer commented *“If we drive there are never any parking spaces near to the park – which means that we have to struggle walking or just go home.”* Someone else talked about having benches just outside or immediately within the park entrance so that it was possible to recover before going into the park.

Way marking and other interpretation, including a leaflet so that visitors can anticipate any problems before they arrive were thought to be important. Aids to help lessen confusion – making entrances and exits distinctive and marking transport links would also be welcomed.

There was considerable interest in a programme of activities, including guided walks. In order to make these activities successful links between the environmental sector and care organisations need to be strengthened with dementia friendly training being made available to activity providers and information about activities and opportunities distributed to care organisations.

From the consultation a series of recommendations have been made to develop Barnes Green as a Friendly Park.

Recommendations

All those who took part in the consultation were supportive of developing Barnes Green as a Friendly Park. The recommendations from the consultation fall into 5 different categories.

1. Physical improvements to the park. Recommendations in this category include:

- Provision of flat wide pavements that are accessible to all but especially by wheel chairs, and people with walking aids such as sticks and wheeled walkers
- Safe access to the pond for people in wheelchairs and using walking aids. A rail and some resting places near the pond were also mentioned. This could include a carved interpretive barrier.
- Regular benches and resting points throughout the park. Ideally these should have a backrest as well as a seat, although some people involved in discussions like the idea of resting on logs.
- Easy access to toilet facilities and other facilities.

2. Way marking and interpretation This was considered to be an important element of the project as it would give confidence in using the park on a regular basis.

- Distinctive entry and exit points. There was support for the idea of carved animals at each entry, but there was also a feeling in the discussion groups that there should be colour coding linked to any scheme.
- In the discussion groups there was support for the use of way markers to mark out set routes of varying length. The groups suggested the use of colour coding within the park to encourage park users to explore the park more than they might otherwise.
- The idea of informative notices and signs covering the history and ecology of the Green was also welcomed.
- The idea of a meeting point that could be used for activities, or somewhere to return to if confused or lost was also supported. This point could be near to the facilities such as the café where people naturally congregate.

3. Transport

- Marking public transport links from within and outside the park was considered to be important.
- There was support for disabled parking bays on the streets adjacent to the park.
- There were suggestions of improved road crossings in the streets surrounding the park. Another suggestion not explored by the discussion groups could be some road safety training for carers and people with dementia to encourage good practice when walking to the park.
- Information on how to get to the park and what transport links were available was also requested by respondents. A leaflet distributed to care organisations could set out this information along with other information such as a map of the way marked routes and some additional information about facilities available in the park.

- Three people out of 13 suggested that there should be a transport scheme which brought people with dementia to the park. The model used in Richmond Park was given by the participants.

4. Activities within the park

- There was support for the idea of activities within the park that could be attended by people with dementia. It would be useful for these activities to be run by groups or individuals who are able to support people with dementia in an appropriate way although the activities could be open to the wider community.
- One of the issues that became clear is that those who responded were not aware of events that are run by the environment sector within the borough in local parks including nearby Barnes Common. Methods of disseminating information effectively to people with dementia should be developed. A means of identifying events that are suitable for people with dementia should also be developed. South West London Environment Network (SWLEN) are crucial to the development of this role and ongoing liaison with organisations such as the Alzheimer's Society, the Carers Centre, Age Concern and other similar groups who disseminate information to about events to their clients.
- Organisations, including Friends groups, who hold activities in the park and other parks in the borough could receive the Dementia Friends training to help them support people with dementia who attend their events.
- Methods of highlighting activities and facilities in other parks that are suitable for this group should be investigated – few participants in discussions were aware of the outdoor gyms, health walks or conservation volunteering opportunities in the borough.
- There was some support for activities held specifically for people with dementia. Activities that respondents suggested that they currently enjoy are: looking at and being in nature, guided walks, exercising pets, informal games and walking.

5. Additional support

- One respondent in the written consultation suggested that there should be **befrienders** who could take people to the park. Some of the discussion groups also explored the idea of (for example) Friends groups taking people with dementia to the park on a regular basis together with their carers.
- **Dogs** to borrow was also another suggestion. This could be part of an initiative with befrienders.
- **Help points** were another suggestion made in the written consultation. There is a café in the park which could take on this role perhaps with some signage encouraging people to ask for help if they become lost or confused. Someone else made the suggestion of dementia friendly staff in surrounding buildings so that they are able to help if they come across anyone who is confused. This is part of the wider Dementia Friendly Village Scheme.
- **Wheelchairs and walking frames** to borrow to allow access to the park was also suggested. This is probably an action for one of the organisations based on the Green perhaps working closely with Parks staff. It could be part of a wider scheme.
- **Toilets** with space for 2 people. There is a disabled toilet in the café which allows for 2 people and a wheelchair. There is also a disabled ramp. All organisations on the Green should be encouraged to join the community toilet scheme. www.richmond.gov.uk/community_toilet_scheme

Acknowledgements

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If you require the detailed report and analysis of the consultation please contact:

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