

London Parks Benchmarking Research Project

Summary of Survey Findings

REPORT BY

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Table of Contents

1. Introduction 5

2. Methodology 7

2.1 Household surveys 7

i. The Questionnaire 7

ii. The respondents 7

2.2 Field Surveys 8

i. The questionnaire 8

ii. The respondents 8

iii. Barriers to participation 8

3. Park Uses: 9

3i. Walking 9

3ii. Cycling 10

3ii Sports 11

4. Safety 12

5 Other Facilities 12

Conclusion 12

1. Introduction

The London Parks Benchmarking Project was carried out in two phases:

- Initial pilot survey in West Ham Park
- Five other surveys in parks each representing one of each of the five typologies in the park hierarchy as laid down in the London Plan.

The parks selected were:

Typology	Park	Borough	Body Responsible
Small	Newington Green	Islington	Islington
Local	Central Park	Newham	City of London
District	Finsbury Park and Parkland Walk	Haringey	Haringey
Metropolitan	Tooting Bec Common	Wandsworth	Wandsworth
Regional	Richmond Park	Richmond	Royal Parks

The park reports presented the results of two surveys, field and household, undertaken simultaneously for each park. The reports were not intended to include detailed conclusions for each park but were intended to facilitate analysis of each park in order to draw conclusions and recommendations at a later stage. Each set of survey data was presented in a user-friendly, easy-to-read manner to enable quick and clear understanding of park issues and park user views as well as to facilitate comparisons with other parks in the study. What follows is a brief top-line comparison of key issues across all the parks in the study. These issues are the methodological processes themselves and three key topics explored within each survey:

- Park Uses:
  - Walking
  - Cycling
  - Sports
- Safety
- Other Facilities (perceived/required)

Other aspects were covered in the surveys, including park access, frequency of park visits, and characteristics of park users, but these are not discussed in this summary.

It is hoped that this brief summary will inform the approach of the next phase of the project ie to roll this survey out across all London parks.

2. Methodology

The survey for each park was carried out in two stages running parallel with each other – a household survey and a field survey. In theory, a field respondent could also have received and responded to a household survey though if this did happen it was not noted or remarked on.

2.1 Household surveys

i. The Questionnaire

The standardised format of the household survey and its application meant that some questions were not suitable for some of the parks For example, almost one third of Newington Green household respondents said they did not use the park since they did not view it as a park given it's diminutive size and therefore limited offer, it's function was commonly viewed as a roundabout. It's size also meant many of the park users e.g. sports, facilities, cycling questions were not applicable to this park. The issue of applicable questions also applied to Richmond Park which, functioning first and foremost as an AONB, does not have a "standard" park offer, hence it's lack of children's playgrounds, sports facilities. Similarly, the Parkland Walk stretch associated with Finsbury Park was a distinctive space altogether, functioning as a green route for cyclists and pedestrians, that many of the survey questions were not applicable. Tooting Common functioned as a "Common" rather than a "park" – open access 24/7 – and so many of the sports and facilities questions were not applicable. All these areas had different functions and did not fit the template of a "park".

The questionnaire was rather long. There were some yes/no questions which could have been left out and yes/no responses could have been derived though conditional questions ie IF you use/feel….

ii. The respondents

The household survey for each park saw 2,400 surveys delivered to 24 points marked out at 5, 10, 15 and 20 minute walks from the park boundaries. The surveys hoped to achieve a 15% return rate – a return-rate expected of a commercial direct mail shot. The return rates below show a varied picture:

Park	**Return rate from households** [i]	
	Number	**%**
Pilot: *West Ham*	*203*	*8*
N Green	272	11
Central	202	8
Tooting	201	8
Richmond	639	27
Finsbury	373	16

[i] Defined as responses received at the cut-off date for analysis. Additional responses were received too late for this.

Various factors affect the return rates including age and socio-economic profile of the catchment area and the proximity of other parks. among others. For example, Richmond had the highest return rate. It's household respondents tended to be wealthier, older and almost exclusively white British and responding to a park which has an emotive pull in general. Compare this with Central Park, one of the lowest return rates, whose household respondents were much younger, with lower household incomes and less than 50% being white British. Tooting Common and Newington Green have identical return rates. They both have younger households but the profile of Tooting's households is as wealthy and white British as Richmond's whereas Newington Green's household respondents were of lower incomes and more ethnically diverse. The socio-demographic profile of Newington Green and Finsbury Park are identical - young, middle income and reasonably ethnically diverse - yet almost half as many households again responded to Finsbury Park's survey than did to Newington Green's. The lack of pattern in responses makes it difficult to identify how and where to improve the household methodology

to achieve higher rates of return (apart from increasing the sample size in the poor response rate catchment areas, which would cost more money).

2.2 Field Surveys

i. The questionnaire
In addition to 2.1i above, the field survey went through many permutations before going live since it had to mirror the household survey for effective comparison of responses yet still remain within the 10-min interview length to ensure park users would participate. With this achieved, questions answered at home at the respondents' leisure sometimes received different responses than those in the park under a time-limit i.e. households could give more than one answer to several questions and be as expansive as they wished in comments boxes, whereas field respondents could only give one answer or a very brief description in a comments box given the practicalities of gathering fuller answers whilst standing in the park.

ii. The respondents
Field respondents tended to be younger than their household equivalents with the majority of respondents being in their twenties and thirties. The exception to this was Richmond Park, the age distribution of which was wider across the age groups. Field participants also tended to come from a wider ethnic distribution than households respondents.

iii. Barriers to participation
Field surveys had to overcome various issues including poor weather, reluctant participants, and capturing participants for various socio-economic and users groups. The latter group was particularly difficult regarding cyclists who were reluctant to stop and answer a 10-minute survey. Their speed prevented researchers from approaching them and encouraging them to stop, with only a small minority of cyclists in the park for a leisurely cycle ride.

The project resources for the field survey became quite stretched for the larger parks which required more coverage in terms of percentage of gates covered. However, data gathered is a fairly thorough representation of park user/user group experiences.

3. Park Uses:

3i. Walking

Q13 WALKING - If you walk in the park, why? (please tick as many of the following that apply)

Relax / enjoy the environment / green space

Travelling through / short cut .....

Exercise.....

Commuting to work.....

Dog walking.....

Other

Q14 Generally, how long do you spend walking in this park?

Up to 15 minutes .....

30 minutes - 1 hour.....

15-30 minutes.....

More than 1 hour .....

Q15 How satisfied are you with the quality of walking routes (paths and roads) in the park?

Very good *Good* *Fair* *Poor* *Very Poor* *Don't Know / No opinion*

Q16 Is there anything that could be done to improve provision for walking in this park? - please describe

Q17 Do you feel there is any conflict between walkers and other users of the park?

Yes *No*

Q18 If you feel there is a conflict between walkers and other users please describe this conflict below and how you think this could be resolved.

Q13-14. In comparing the five parks for "why people go for a walk in the park" it is immediately striking that there is no shared pattern of use across the parks and no pattern of use across the two sets of respondents across the park regardless of typology and catchment area. This supports the observation drawn from the questionnaire: park "fit" above that there is no "standard" park use as each park has its own particular function and is used accordingly. Accordingly, there was no pattern either across time spent in the park.

Q15. However, in contrast, both sets of users across all parks were very/satisfied with the quality of walking routes in their parks with field respondents being more so than household respondents. Only both sets of respondents for Newington Green agreed equally across the rating score, probably given its diminutive size and role as a roundabout.

Q16. Again, perhaps reflecting the particular function of each park, there was no pattern between suggestions of how walking provision could be improved. Whereas the largest, Richmond, emphasised requests for resolution to conflict with cyclists, Finsbury Park/Parkland Walk and Tooting Common promoted requests for better footpaths. Finsbury and Central parks promoted concerns regarding lighting/safety. Newington Green highlighted the problem of dog-fouling. Neither was there always agreement on issues for improved walking provision between the sets of respondents per park.

Q17-18. There was a distinct pattern across all respondents across all parks. Overall neither sets of respondents felt there was a conflict between walkers and other users though this was felt more so by field than household respondents across all parks except Richmond where both sets were roughly split 50:50 over conflict. In the three largest parks the key conflict with walkers was cyclists. In the two smallest dogs and groups of youths were the main sources of conflict with walkers.

3ii. Cycling

Q19 CYCLING - If you cycle in the park, why? (please tick as many of the following that apply)

Leisure ..... *Travelling through / short cut*.....

Exercise ..... *Commuting to work* .....

Other (please specify)

Q20 Generally, how long do you spend cycling in this park?

Up to 15 minutes..... *30 minutes - 1 hour* .....

15-30 minutes ..... *More than 1 hour*.....

Q21 How satisfied are you with the quality of cycle routes and roads in the park?

Very good *Good* *Fair* *Poor* *Very Poor* *Don't Know / No opinion*

Q22 Is there anything that could be done to improve provision for cycling in this park? - please describe

Q23 Do you feel there is any conflict between cyclists and other users of the park?

Yes ..... *No* .....

Q24 If you feel there is a conflict between cyclists and other users please describe this conflict below and how you think this could be resolved.

Note: no cycling allowed in Central Park so these questions were not asked in that survey.

Q19-20. As with Walking, there appears to be no immediately obvious pattern as to why cyclists cycle in the park both across parks and across respondents groups across parks. Both sets in Richmond cycle for leisure and exercise, both sets in Tooting Common are distributed more evenly across all cycle purposes, household cyclists use Newington Green and Finsbury Park as cut-throughs whereas field survey cyclists cycle in Newington Green for leisure and in Finsbury Park for exercise. However, not surprisingly, there was a tally between reasons for cycling and length of time spent doing so.

Q21 As with walking routes, both sets of respondents for Richmond and Finsbury parks were generally satisfied with the cycling routes in their parks though field respondents more so. However, whereas field respondents were generally satisfied for Tooting Common and Newington Green household respondents rating of cycle routes were not and their responses more widely distribution across the rating score.

Q22. As with walking provision improvement, there appeared to be no pattern of suggestions between field and household respondents across park but a certain amount of tallying between the two sets within their own parks. For example, Richmond household respondents wanted better surfaced and more designated cycle paths and car restrictions, the field respondents put forward the latter two. Finsbury Park household respondents wanted better surfacing particularly in Parkland Walk whereas field respondents did not make any suggestions at all. Both sets for Tooting Common wanted to see more separate paths and only household respondents in Newington Green gave a response at all and to say the park was too small an issue for cycling.

Q23-24 As with walking, both sets did not feel there was a conflict between cyclists and other users expect in Richmond park where the responses from both sets were more evenly divided. Whereas both sets who did feel there was a conflict between cyclists and other users wanted to see more separate cycle paths in Richmond, field respondents in Finsbury and Newington Green did not put forward any description of conflict at all. Household respondents from both Finsbury/Parkland and Tooting Common wanted to see more separate paths and more considerate cycling. Newington Green households wanted to see a separate cycle lane and more responsible cycling.

3ii Sports

Q25 SPORT - If you participate in sport in this park , what formal and informal sport(s) do you participate in? (please tick as many as apply)

Rugby	*Bowls* .....
Football	*Cricket* .....
Tennis	*Frisbee* .....
Rounders/Softball	

Other (please describe)

Q26 Generally, how often do you participate in sport in this park?

Almost every day	*Within the last six months* .....
Once or twice a week	*Longer ago* .....
Once every two weeks	*Never* .....
About once a month	*Don't know/ Do not wish to answer*.

Q27 At each visit generally how long do you spend participating in sport in this park?

Up to 30 minutes	*1 - 2 hours*	*more than four hours* .....
30 minutes - 1 hour	*2-4 hours*	

Q28 Generally, how do you rate the sports facilities in this park?

	very good	*good*	*fair*	*poor*	*very poor*	*non existent*	*don"t know*
Access to the facilities (by car or on foot)							
Availability of the facilities							
Quality of the facilities							
Sports staff							
Cleanliness							
Value for money							

Q25-27 As with walking and cycling there was no pattern between sports played across the parks and between respondents groups across parks. The “formal” sports would only be possible if the park made provision for this ie tennis, bowls. Football and frisbee was played across almost all parks but to various extents among each of the two sets of respondents. The number of times sports were played by respondent group was also without a particular pattern as was the length of time spent doing so.

Q28 On rating sports facilities, both sets of respondents across all parks, with the exception of Newington Green, were divided between “good” and “unsure”, due to the extent, nature or lack of sports provision in the parks. Again, as with walking and cycling, a larger proportion of field respondents tended to rate well compared to households.

As highlighted in the 2.1i and 2.2i the questionnaires were not tailored to meet the specific provision of each park making some of the responses and comparison between sports provision a rather meaningless. Neither Richmond Park nor Newington Green offer formal sports provision and the other three parks offer different types of sports offer from activities on offer to open-access or booking-based use.

4. Safety

Q33 How safe do you feel in the park?

Very safe *safe* *unsafe* *very unsafe* *never thought about it*

Q34 If you do not feel safe please tell us why.

There was consistency across all park with the majority of both sets of respondents feeling safe in their parks. This consistency continued across all parks among household respondents who were the only ones who registered feeling unsafe: approximately a tenth, a sixth, a fifth and a quarter of them in Newington Green, Tooting Common, Finsbury Park/Parkland Walk and Central Park respectively.

Both sets of respondents across the larger parks - Richmond, Finsbury and Tooting - said they felt unsafe due to the feeling of isolation, lack of permeability/natural surveillance and formal surveillance as expected in large expanses. This was especially so for Parkland Walk. Household respondents across the three parks in the more deprived, urban areas -Tooting Common, Finsbury Park and Central park – said they felt unsafe due to unlawful and threatening behaviour. Field respondents for Tooting and Finsbury quoted past violent incidents and [the need for] more lighting and [lack of] police respectively.

5 Other Facilities

Q35 Do you feel there is a need for any facilities not currently provided in the park?

Yes..... *No*.....

Q36 If Yes to Question 35 please provide details

There appeared to be no pattern across parks or between sets of respondents across parks. The need for other facilities was very mixed in general. Of those facilities requested the most popular ones were, in no particular order, better, more and age-appropriate children's play areas and more, better and free toilets. Household respondents for the three large urban parks wanted to see more/better sports facilities. Both sets for Central and Finsbury parks also wanted to see more staff/wardens for security.

Conclusion

The comparison on the key park uses and issues above demonstrate that there is limited similarity between any of these spaces in terms of what they deliver, how they function, how they are actually used and the expectations and needs made of them. In carrying out a one-size-fits-all survey across all typologies and within various socio-economic catchment areas any comparisons need to be drawn with these characteristics in mind. In fact, to draw meaningful comparisons it would be sensible to have joint consideration of the results by the park wardens and managers who work in the parks on a daily basis.

Usefully, there is similarity on the issue of safety on, which almost all respondents in both groups across all parks feel safe – a testament to the responsible bodies managing spaces upon which there are so many varied demands.

The table below compares survey response rates, estimated park usage levels, and usage measured as park visitors per hectare per year across the park typologies. This is a brief summary of the estimates set out in each Parks survey report. The figures should be treated with caution as the estimates are based on sample counts grossed up for entry gates not covered by the counters and adjusted for various other factors like seasonality. These inevitably induce a degree of uncertainty. However, it is encouraging that the grossed up estimates approximate the figures derived from automatic counters in one park, hence order of magnitude may be reasonable. Additionally, it will be noticed that use intensity per hectare falls as park size increases, which is what would be expected.

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	Size		Respondents			Park usage		
			Household		Field			
	Acres	Has.	Number	Return rate	Number	Persons/ha/yr	Manual count users/yr	Automatic count users/yr
Pilot: West Ham	*77*	*31.18*	*203*	*8%*	*447*	*10,300-31,300*	*512,000*	*975,566 (05/06)*
N Green	0.66	0.3	260	11%	394	854,900	256,500	
Central	4	10	202	8%	398	52,700	526,900	513,451(07/08)
Finsbury	115	46.5	373	16%	413	28,900	1,343,700	
Tooting	221	89	259	11%	420	20,100	1,787,000	
Richmond	2360	954	639	27%	416	3,300	3,164,000	