

Heritage Lottery Fund

State of the UK's Parks II | Public Survey

A report prepared by BritainThinks

Thursday 30th June 2016

Method

BritainThinks surveyed a nationally representative sample of 2,130 adults (16+) resident in the United Kingdom. Fieldwork was conducted between 27th and 31st May 2016 using an online method. The questionnaire was drawn up by BritainThinks and the Heritage Lottery Fund.

This report sets out the headline findings from the survey, as well as an overview of the most notable demographic subgroup differences and, where relevant, comparison to the data from the first State of the UK's Parks survey conducted in 2014.

In the previous wave of research, the method used was face-to-face (CAPI). This change of method may be partly responsible for some variability between the findings from the two waves of the research. In particular, the consistently higher proportion of respondents answering 'Don't know' in this year's survey may be largely attributable to the use of an online rather than face-to-face method.

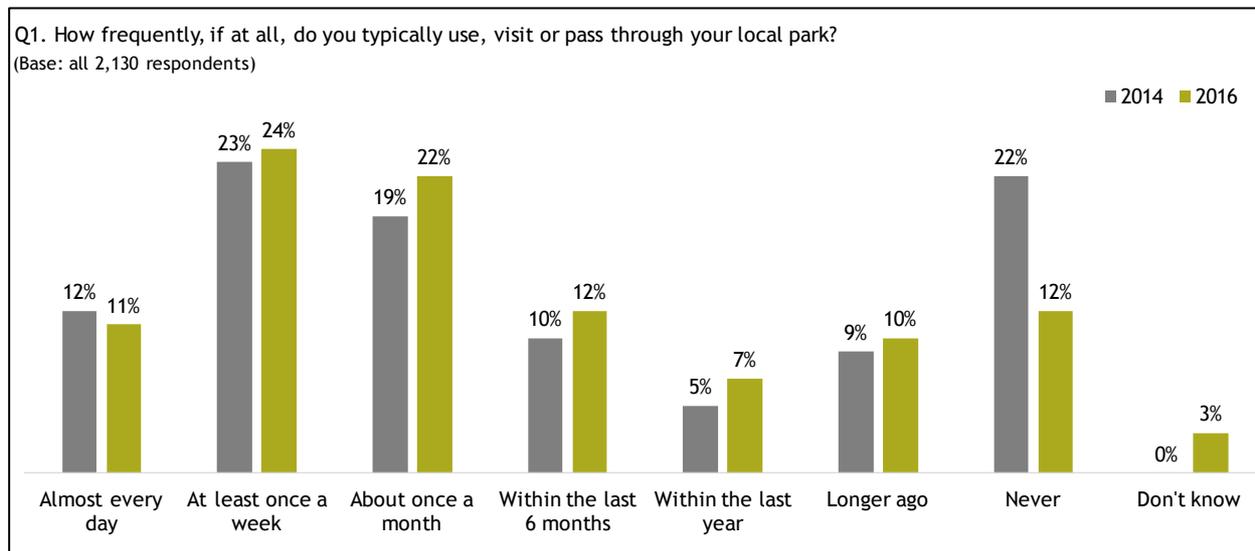
Executive summary

- Use of local parks is widespread: 85% of UK adults have used their local park (up from 78% in 2014) and 35% use, visit or pass through it at least once a week.
 - Use is generally higher among younger adults (aged 16-34), parents with young children, BAME residents, and urban residents (particularly London).
- Perceptions of the condition of local parks are generally positive: 49% of UK adults think their local park is in good condition and a further 33% think it is in fair condition.
 - Perceptions of the condition of local parks have improved since 2014, when 44% of local residents thought their park to be in good condition.
 - The condition of parks is generally seen as stable, though 20% see their local park's condition as having improved in the last 3 years and 10% as having declined.
 - Children's play areas are the aspect of local parks most likely to be seen as improved, while anti-social behaviour and vandalism are most likely to be perceived as getting worse.
- A majority of UK adults (55%) are very or fairly concerned about reductions in council budgets having a negative impact on the condition of their local park.
 - This concern is most widespread among frequent users of their local park (66% of those who use their local park once a week or more are very or fairly concerned) and those who perceive their park to already be in poor condition (78%).
- In the context of potential park maintenance budget reductions, UK adults are fairly divided in terms of which type of park should be prioritised for funding. On balance, neighbourhood children's playgrounds are most likely to be prioritised for funding, with sports pitches and tennis courts least likely to be prioritised for funding.
- UK adults are generally supportive of supplementary forms of funding for parks, with most widespread support for greater funding from the national lottery (79% strongly or somewhat support). There is, however, widespread opposition to increasing charges for using park facilities (with only 20% supporting and 53% opposed).
- Favourite memories of local parks tend to involve playing, spending time with friends and family, and the wildlife and nature there.

Frequency of use

Use of local parks is widespread with over a third (35%) of UK adults using, visiting or passing through their local park at least once a week and around one in ten (11%) doing so almost every day.

The proportion that has used their local park has increased since the previous wave of research: in 2014, 78% had used their local parks at least once, compared to 85% in 2016.



Younger adults are more likely to be park users than mature adults: 39% of 18-24s and 45% of 25-34s use the park at least once a week, compared to 29% of 55-64s and 27% of over-65s. Similarly, parents with young children are more likely to use parks frequently: 54% of those with children aged under 5 and 52% of those with children aged 5-10 use their local park at least once a week.

Use of local parks tends to be higher than the national average (35% using their local park once a week or more often) in Scotland (44%) and London (also 44%) - but lower in Yorkshire and the Humber (27%) and Eastern England (29%). Frequency of use of parks also seems to be slightly higher in urban areas than rural areas. For example, 74% of urban residents have used their park within the last 6 months, compared to 66% of suburban residents and 61% of rural residents.

There is also difference in park usage by ethnicity, with BAME residents more likely to be frequent park users (45% using their local park once a week or more frequently) than White residents (34%).

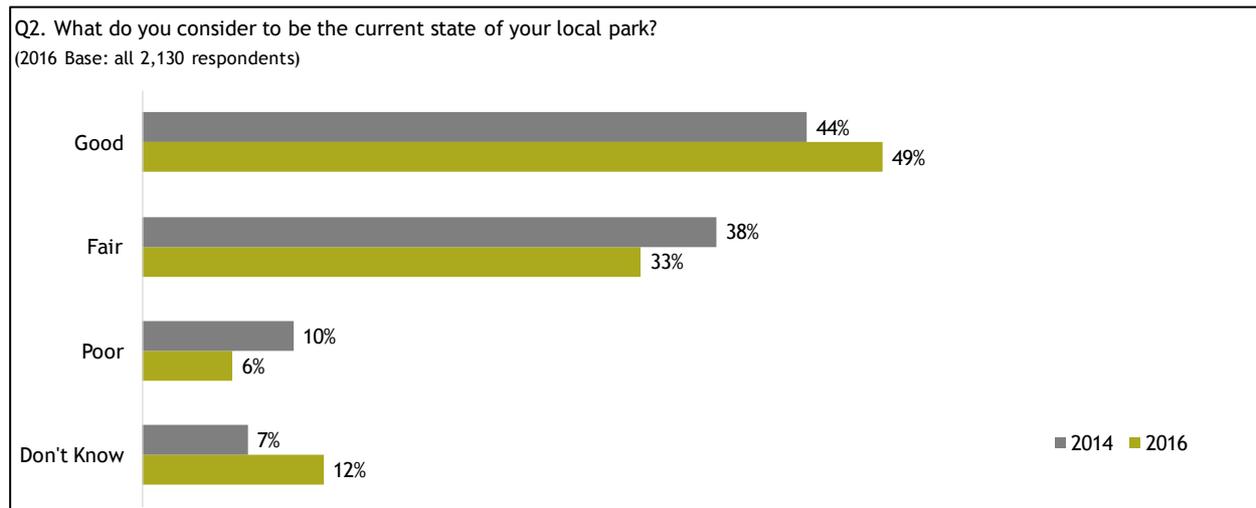
Those with longstanding physical or mental conditions or disabilities are less likely to be frequent users of their local park (28% v 37% of those without) - but most have used it at some point (only 16% having never used their local park).

Infrequent or non-users are much more likely than more frequent users to answer 'Don't know' to a range of other questions in the survey. Indeed, the majority of those who reply 'Don't know' are either infrequent or non-users. For example, as the following section shows, 12% of UK adults don't know about the condition of their local park; of these, 61% are non-users and 23% are infrequent users (not using the park in the last year).

Condition of local park

Around half (49%) of UK adults think that their local park is in good condition and a further third (33%) think it is in fair condition; only 6% think that the condition of their local park is poor.

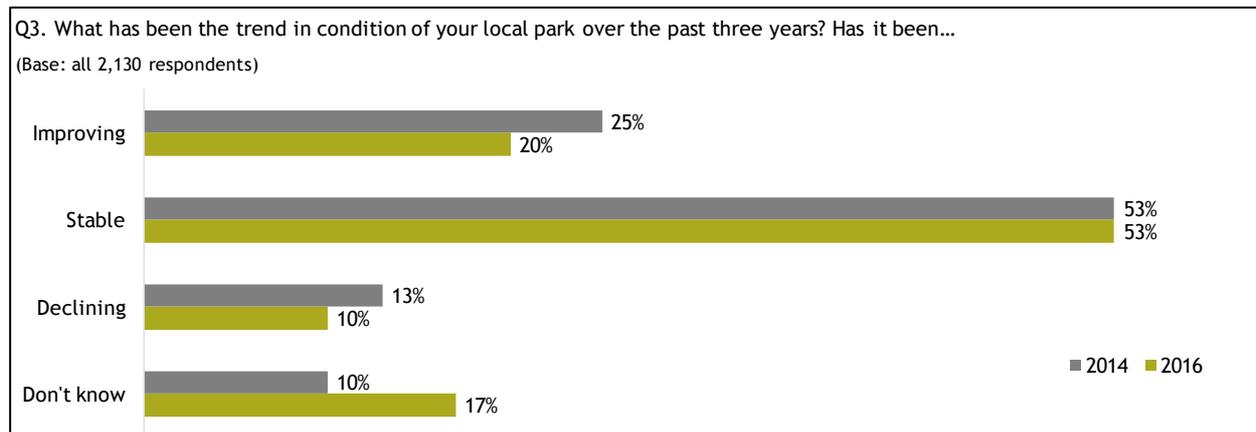
Park users are more likely to have a favourable opinion on the condition of their local park, with the proportion of those thinking it is in good or fair condition increasing to 54% and 36% respectively (and the proportion thinking it is in poor condition remaining at 6%). This is largely because they are more likely to be familiar with the park and less likely to answer ‘Don’t know’ (down to 4% compared to 64% of non-users).



Middle-class (ABC1) adults are more likely to perceive their local park to be in good condition than working class (C2DE) adults: 53% v 44% respectively. Similarly, council tenants are more likely (12%) to believe their local park to be in poor condition than residents of any other form of tenure.

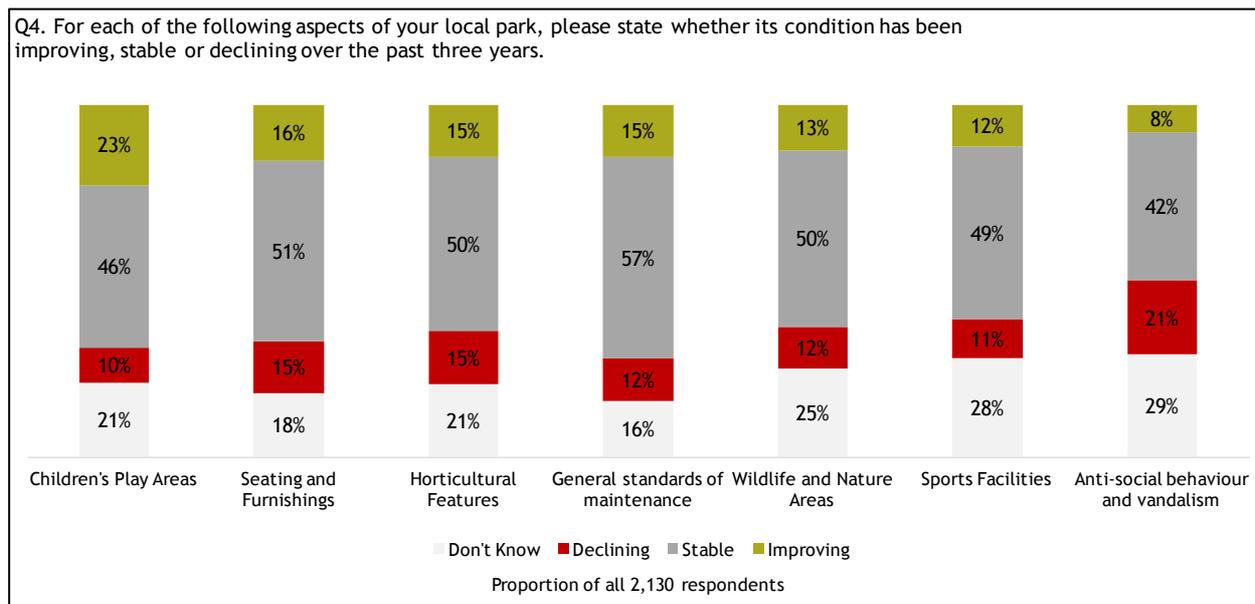
Positive perceptions of the condition of local parks are most widespread in London (56% saying the condition of their local park is good) and the South East (53%) and least widespread in Yorkshire & Humber (40%) and West Midlands (42%). More broadly, positivity is greatest in urban areas (where 53% believe the condition of their local park to be good).

Perceptions of the condition of local parks have slightly improved since 2014 when UK adults were more likely to think their park was in poor condition (10% v 6%) and less likely to think it was in good condition (44% v 49%).



Indeed, when asked directly, a fifth of UK adults (20%) currently feel as though their local park's condition has improved in the past three years - this is double the proportion that thinks their park has declined (10%). The majority (53%), however, believe that the condition of their park has remained stable. Perceptions of change in recent years have stayed broadly stable since the previous wave of research conducted in 2014 (albeit with more Don't Knows).

Council tenants (17%), working-class (C2DE) adults (12%) and those with a disability (18%) are more likely than average to perceive a decline in the condition of their local park over the past three years. Frequent users (27% of those who use their local park once a week or more), those who think their park is in a 'good' condition (32%), and respondents in the North East (31%) and London (28%) are more likely than average to believe their park is improving.

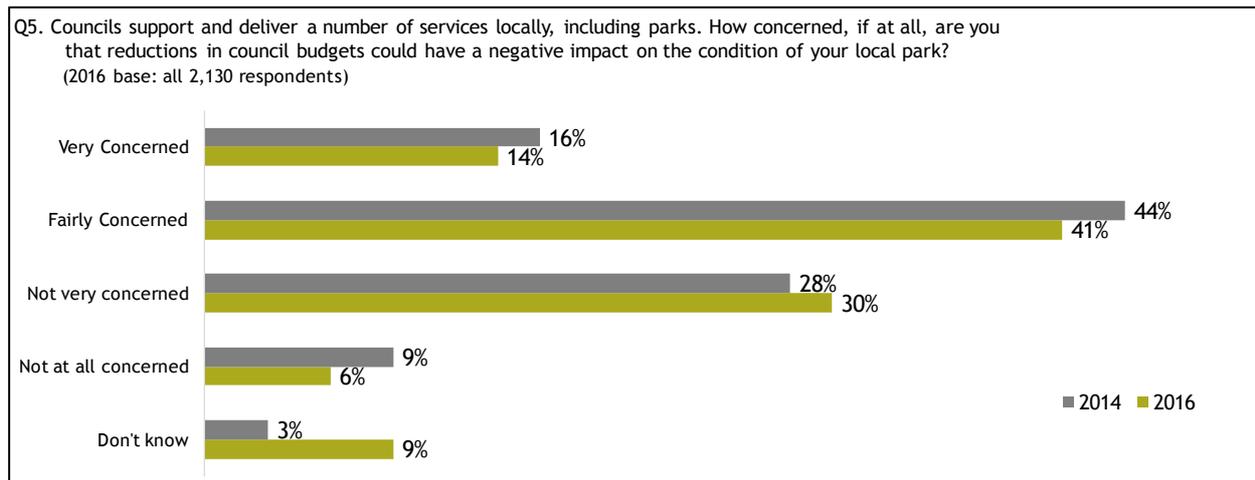


The condition of various specific aspects of local parks is generally seen to be stable over the past three years too. The condition of children's play areas (46%), seatings and furnishings (51%), horticultural features (50%), general standards of maintenance (57%), wildlife and nature areas (50%), sports facilities (49%) and anti-social behaviour and vandalism (42%) are all seen as stable.

The condition of children's play areas (23%) is most widely perceived as having improved in the past three years. By contrast, anti-social behaviour and vandalism is most widely perceived to have become worse: indeed, a higher proportion of UK adults believe anti-social behaviour and vandalism has become worse (21%) than think it has improved over the last three years (8%) (although most still think it has been roughly stable 42%).

Concern with impact of reduction of council budgets on condition of local park

A majority of UK adults (55%) are very or fairly concerned about reductions in council budgets having a negative impact on the condition of their local park, with 14% very concerned. This is barely changed from 2014, where concern was at a similar level.



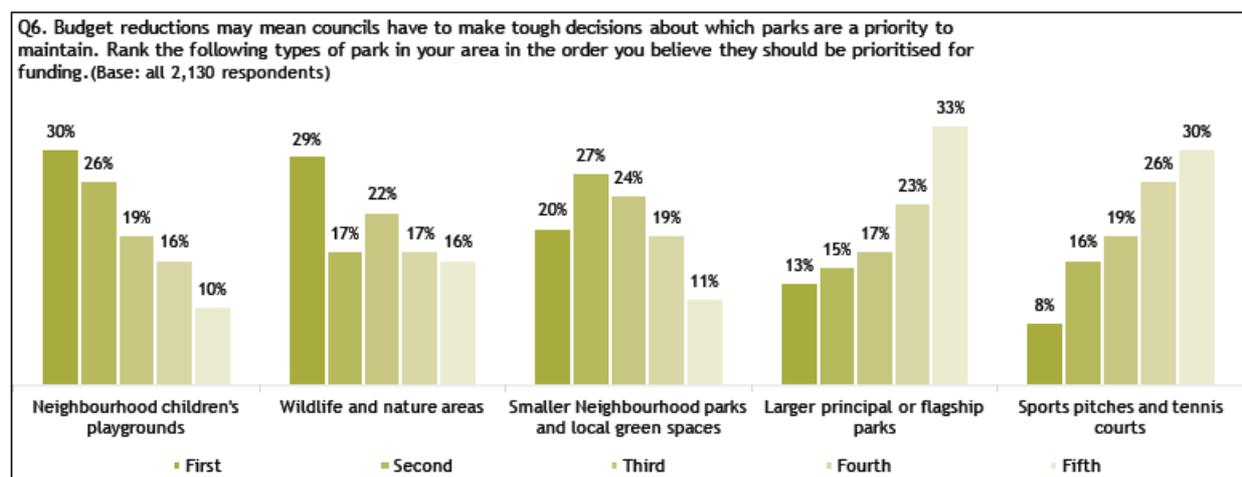
Those who already perceive their park to be in poor condition are most likely to be concerned about the impact of council budget cuts on the condition of their local park: 78% of those are fairly (40%) or very concerned (38%).

Frequent users are more concerned with the potential impact of council budget cuts but significant minorities of infrequent and non-users express concern: 66% of those who use their local park at least once a week express concern, compared with 49% of those who last used their park over 6 months ago and 30% of non-users.

Those demographic groups who are most likely to be park users are, accordingly, more likely to be concerned with the impact of council budget cuts on the condition of their local park, in particular those with children under 5 (70% very or fairly concerned) and BAME adults (62%). The exception to this is mature adults who are more likely to be concerned than younger adults, despite being less likely to use their local park: 62% of 55-64s and 61% of over-65s are concerned about the issue, compared to 42% of 18-24s.

Prioritisation of different types of park for funding

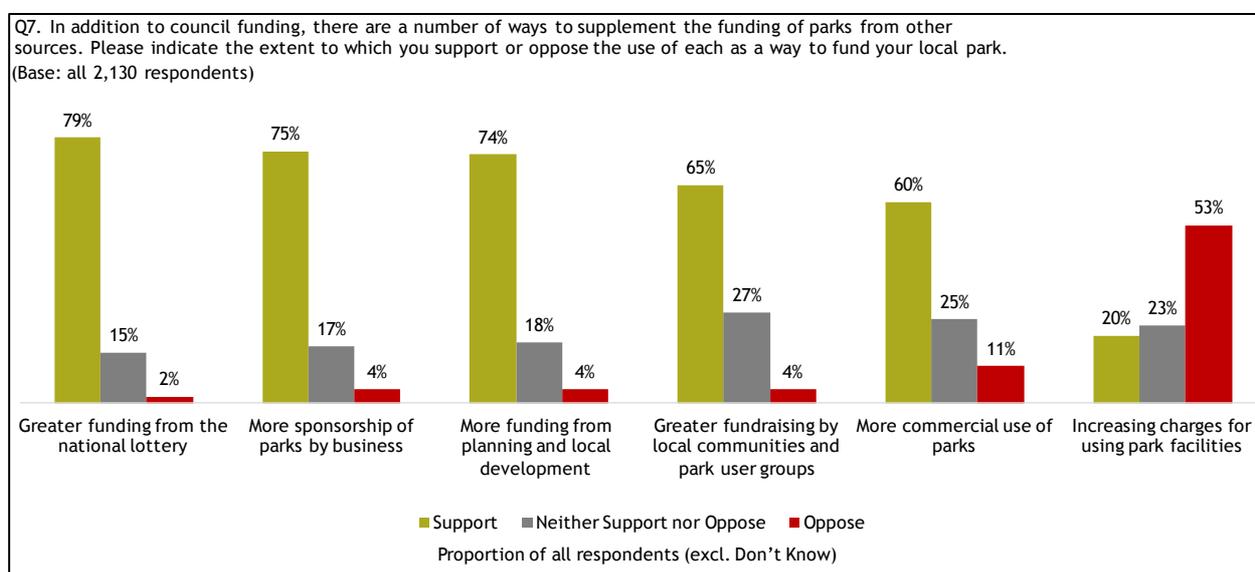
In the context of potential park maintenance budget reductions, UK adults are fairly divided in terms of which type of park should be prioritised for funding. On balance, neighbourhood children’s playgrounds are most likely to be prioritised (56% of all respondents selecting them as one of their top two priorities), followed by wildlife and nature areas (46%) and small neighbourhood parks and local green spaces (46%). Larger principal or flagship parks (28%) and sports pitches and tennis courts (24%) are least likely to be prioritised for funding.



There are no consistent significant different differences between different demographic subgroups in terms of the types of park prioritised. Perhaps unsurprisingly, however, those with young children are more likely than those without to believe that neighbourhood children’s playgrounds should be prioritised for funding: 82% of those with children aged under 5 and 77% of those with children aged 5-10 believe they should be first or second priority, compared with only 50% of those with no children aged 0-15.

Support for ways to supplement funding of parks

Generally, UK adults are supportive of supplementary ways of funding parks from other sources. Significant majorities support greater funding from the national lottery (79% strongly or somewhat support), more sponsorship of parks by business (75%), more funding from planning and local development (74%), greater fundraising by local communities and park user groups (65%) and even more commercial use of parks (60%). There is, however, widespread opposition to increasing charges for using park facilities (with only 20% supporting and 53% opposed).

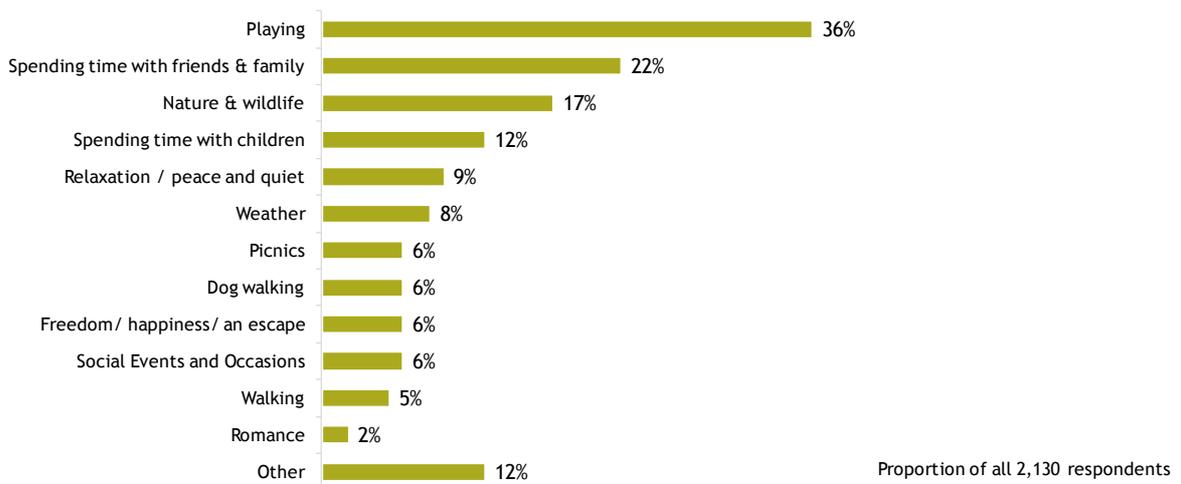


Support for supplementary ways of funding parks is generally higher among frequent park users than infrequent or non-users. For example, 63% of frequent users (once a week or more) support more commercial use of parks compared to 55% of non-users, while 79% of frequent users support more sponsorship of parks by business compared to 59% of non-users. When it comes to increasing charges for using park facilities, opposition is higher among frequent users than non-users (at 55% and 46% respectively) but this is largely because non-users are more likely to not express an opinion rather than because of greater support for the idea.

Favourite park memory

UK adults’ favourite memories of their local park tend to involve playing, spending time with friends and family, and the nature and wildlife there.

Q8. In a sentence or two, please tell us your favourite memory of your local park.



When asked to name their favourite memory of their local park, 36% of UK adults reference some form of ‘playing’ (usually when much younger), including using children’s play areas (chosen by 14%), playing various games (9%) and playing football (7%).

- “I remember playing an impromptu game of badminton on the grass in our local bowls park with my Grandma when I was quite young. As she wasn’t known for her sporting prowess this was a unique occasion!”
- “Playing there as a 10 year old. (I am 72!)”
- “Playing in the paddling pool as a very young child with all my friends when it was very hot and we had ice cream from the ice cream van.”
- “Going over there playing football on bowling greens when we shouldn’t lol.”

Around a fifth (22%) of UK adults mention spending time with friends and family as their favourite memory while an additional 12% refer to spending time with their children.

- “Lying on the grass and enjoying the sun while hanging out with my friends.”

Taking the grandchildren to a safe environment where they can learn to explore and play outdoors.

- “Taking my grandchildren now to the same park I took their parents to.”
- “Teaching my kids to ride bikes.”

Seventeen percent choose some form of nature and wildlife as their favourite memory. Of these, 7% of UK adults mention green spaces and nature in general, 5% mention looking at birds, squirrels and other wildlife, while 4% reference feeding ducks and swans.

- “My favourite memory when walking through my local park was the sight of a swan and her signets in the water.”
- “The variety of bird and wildlife. In particular seeing Kingfishers fly along the river.”
- “I love when I am sitting in the park and the apple trees are in full bloom.”

Nine percent of UK adults mention relaxation or peace and quiet as their favourite park memory, while 8% choose warm or summery weather as their favourite memory of their local park.

- “Being able to relax in an attractive setting in peace and quiet.”
- “Midnight midsummer stroll through the park on my way home. Warm, perfectly still and inured from the hustle and bustle of the city centre.”

A further 6% mentioned dog walking, while the same number referred to both picnics and specific social events or occasions (e.g. funfairs, live music).

- “My local park does concerts of all sorts: jazz, classical, music from shows, country and Western. All very good and well attended with families & couples. Hard to choose which is the best, all good.”
- “Big family picnic for my wife’s birthday. excellent day.”

Six percent also mentioned being happy or feeling free as their favourite memory of their local park, while 5% simply referred to walking through the park.

- “Just having the freedom to be a child....to enjoy the space, fresh air and the laughter.”
- “I went for a very long walk before going to bed, to improve the quality of my sleep. It was a very nice experience.”

Twelve percent referred to other activities, including using the boating lake (2%), eating ice cream (1%) and fishing (1%).

- “When we went to our local big park. We all fed the ducks and enjoyed the rides. Later on we went to this ice cream stand and all bought a ice cream and my little cousin said this is the best ice cream ice ever had!”
- “Fishing for sticklebacks when I was four (47 years ago) with my older brother.”

Finally, 2% of UK adults mentioned some sort of romantic activity as being their favourite memory of their local park.

- “Walking hand in hand with my first girlfriend.”
- “As a thirteen-year old I used to go to our local park to try to learn how to play tennis. I used to go with a class-mate and two dilapidated tennis racquets and bash the balls around the tennis courts, until a couple of good-looking lads appeared and we would pack it in and flirt with the lads. All very innocent in those days.”