Dunwood Park – User Survey 2010

Dunwood Park opened in 1912 to provide a green space which could be used by the people of Shaw and Crompton for rest and relaxation.

Today Dunwood Park still offers people the chance to walk through natural woodlands and enjoy wildlife. There are facilities to play tennis or bowls and a small children’s play area. However, many of the woodland paths are indistinct and much of the park has become tired and worn and has lost some of its attraction.

Working in partnership, Oldham Parks and Countryside Service and the Friends of Dunwood Park, sought funding to bring Dunwood Park back to its former glory. In March 2010 the Big Lottery and Heritage Lottery Fund awarded £1.09 million for the renovation of Dunwood Park.

Crucially, part of this funding has been given to encourage more community use of the park. This is to ensure that current users get more enjoyment from Dunwood Park and to get new people using the park and benefiting from it.

To start this process, they ask for current information about who uses the park now, how they use it and what they like and don’t like about the park. This is called ‘baseline information’ and it is needed for every Lottery funded project.

Therefore during November 2010, a baseline survey of users was undertaken for Dunwood Park. The survey gathered the views of over 200 local people and made use of a further 90 people’s views, gathered through previous surveys and research.

This booklet summarises what was found out through the baseline survey of users for Dunwood Park.

The Lottery Fund are keen to check that their funding has been put to good use. They want to measure over time to see if there is an increase in the community’s use of Dunwood Park.
Why it is important to encourage more people to use Dunwood Park

Lottery funding for Dunwood Park has been awarded on the condition that more people use the park. In this way, more people will enjoy the benefits that being in a good quality green space can give.

Dunwood Park is already valued by the people who use it but it has great potential to be a much more valuable resource for Shaw and Crompton. It is a special fragment of countryside that is within walking distance for hundreds of people. These countryside qualities make it well placed to deliver benefits to local people in three main ways.

1. Improving the health of local people

We know that access to good quality, well maintained green space can help to improve our physical and mental health by encouraging us to walk more, to play sport or simply to enjoy a green and natural environment. Some doctors prescribe a walk in the park to aid patient’s health as it has been proven to reduce the risk of a heart attack by 50%, diabetes by 50%, colon cancer by 30% and fracture of the femur by up to 40%. If done as part of a group, walking offers social benefits too.

We also know that being close to nature can have a positive impact in terms of mental health. Simply by encouraging more to people to walk there and enjoy what exists already, Dunwood Park could play an important role in improving the health of local people.
2. Providing great experiences for children

This report shows that low numbers of children and young people currently use Dunwood Park but it could provide them with great opportunities to play freely outdoors and experience the natural environment. Forest areas within the urban landscape can offer a stimulating external environment in which to play – resulting in healthier children more able to deal with managed risk. In Scandinavia, children aged around six were found to develop balance and co-ordination faster when playing in a forest than in a traditional playground. Working to offer local children opportunities to access the natural environment of Dunwood Park is very important.

3. A place to bring people together

The restoration plans include improved facilities, a new meeting room and an amphitheatre. These would allow local people to come together and use the park in a greater variety of ways – through arts events, music in the park, community celebrations and meetings. It is these events that help to foster community spirit and cohesion – which makes such a difference to people’s quality of life.

A walk in a park improves the symptoms of children with attention deficit hyperactivity behaviour – at least as much as conventional drug treatments

Reference: The Value of Public Space, CABE Space
More about the baseline user survey

The aim of the baseline survey was to build up a picture of who uses the park and what they do there, how often they come and how they travel to the park. It also asked what difference the park makes to their lives and what they like about it and what they feel would improve it.

The information in this report is based primarily on 208 interviews with users of the park and people living close to it, completed in November 2010. Of these interviews, 132 were completed on site; 29 were completed with people met on streets close to the park; 15 were carried out going door to door and 32 were completed with people attending St Paul’s church fete on November 27th.

The interviews were carried out by Pathways – a social research organisation from Manchester. The results have been analysed and written up by Pathways.

In addition, Pathways has analysed 40 interviews carried out by the Friends of Dunwood Park and Groundwork during 2008. The survey also referred to the views given by 29 school children and 13 young people who took part in workshops with Groundwork, also during 2008. 9 people also attended a focus group called Spaceshaper organised by Pathways on November 30th 2010.

In total 289 people who use the park or who live in the area have given their views. Of these 237 are regular users of Dunwood Park.

A full reference report accompanies this booklet and includes all the data collected. It is available from Richard Vink, Parks and Countryside Services at richard.vink@oldham.gov.uk

The quotes used were given to Pathways during interviews.
Who currently uses Dunwood Park

Dunwood Park is currently used mainly by older adults. 52% of people interviewed who use the park are over the age of 50 while just 12% were under the age of 24. Our interviews all took place in November and it is fair to assume that the park is much better used by families with children and by young people in the summer. Nonetheless, there is a real opportunity to work to get more children and young people using Dunwood Park.

Over 70% of users walk to the park and it appears that the majority live less than 10 minutes walk away. There is great potential to build on the local appeal of Dunwood Park and get many more people who live within walking distance using it. There are lots of things to do at Dunwood Park and the most popular activities at the park are walking – either going for a stroll or walking the dog and enjoying the natural environment – the flowers and the trees. However, people have told us that there aren’t enough things for children and young people to do and addressing this will help increase the numbers of them using the park.

It seems that there is a committed group of users who use the park extremely regularly – they either visit daily or weekly. Most people currently spend between 30 minutes and an hour in the park on a visit. Therefore there is the potential to get people to use the park for longer on each visit.

Who doesn’t use Dunwood Park at the moment?

Only 1% of current users are from BME (black or minority ethnic) communities, with just 12% of users under the age of 24. 7% are registered disabled.
What people like about Dunwood Park

Dunwood Park is unusual amongst town parks as much of it is like a small fragment of wooded countryside. People told us that the natural feel of the park is really important to them and that they value the peace and quiet that this offers them. People also like that Dunwood Park can be used by people of all ages. Of the 248 people who answered this part of the survey:

60% of people told us that the natural feel of the park is very special to them. The woodlands feel untouched. People value having the chance to walk in woodlands with the opportunities to see wildlife – they like to see the squirrels and the birds. It feels like a different world.

44% of people told us that they like that Dunwood Park can be enjoyed by people of all ages. People can watch or play bowls, it is a great place for young children to ride their bikes safely, people go running there or enjoy a quiet walk and others like watching the birds or climbing trees.

26% of people told us that they value the peaceful environment that the park offers. It is a quiet, calm place away from the traffic. People told us that being in the park offers them space to think and wind down and to be able to spend quiet time.

The other things that people like about Dunwood Park are:

- It is well maintained – this is important to 12% of people who told us that the park is kept clean, tidy and free of litter and that they value the work of the park keeper
- It is near to where they live – this is important to 11% of people

It gives me quality time with my kids – the first place we think of if I don’t have the car.

It’s doubly brilliant as it’s on my doorstep and makes where I live so much nicer.

It peps you up as soon as you enter it.

It’s tremendous. I bought my house here because of the park. Without it, I wouldn’t get out.

It keeps me healthy. Because it’s so close, I use it.
The difference Dunwood Park makes to people’s lives

Dunwood Park is very important to the people who use it. It is a relaxing place where they can enjoy the benefits of being out in nature or where they can take regular exercise. They say it improves their quality of life. Of the 179 people who answered this part of the survey:

50% people told us that the park improves the quality of their lives and makes them feel good about where they live. Having a beautiful park on the doorstep enriches people’s lives – they told us that it is a peaceful sanctuary and that it makes them feel happy.

16% of people told us that the park makes them more healthy. People can take regular exercise, it gets them out of the house and the central path through the park makes it easy for people of all ages and abilities to enjoy gentle exercise.

16% of people told us that the park makes them more healthy. People can take regular exercise there, it gets them out of the house and the central path through the park makes it easy for people of all ages and abilities to enjoy gentle exercise.

13% of people told us that Dunwood Park is calming and relaxes them. It is important to people as a place to let the cares of the world go by.

11% of people say it’s a great place for families and children.

You feel miles away from anywhere, but you’re not. It’s peaceful.

We love it. Our garden is small and we spend the whole day here. One day dad came here and we got chips and we ate tea in the park.

It’s like walking through the country. It’s absolutely magnificent, especially the autumn colours.
What people don’t like about Dunwood Park

People told us they don’t like the neglected state of the park and the lack of maintenance. There are also worries about vandalism and anti-social behaviour, which make the park feel unsafe for some users. Of the 206 people who answered this part of the survey, three main areas of concern stand out:

47% of people don’t like the general decline of the park. The biggest issue is the condition of the footpaths which are of poor quality and often flooded or muddy and slippery. People also told us that the woodlands aren’t managed and have become gloomy and that the bluebells that used to be in the woods have gone. The buildings in the park are also in a poor state.

28% of people have worries about anti-social behaviour. People don’t like fly tipping and the vandalism, including damage to the bowling green. Some told us that they feel vulnerable when they are alone in the park or when it’s very dark. The activities of some young people also worry some users.

23% of people told us that litter and issues with dogs are the things they don’t like about Dunwood Park.

18% of people told us that there was nothing that they didn’t like about Dunwood Park – it meets all their needs.

“"The bit between the bridge and the park entrance is a mess – muddy and horrible."

“"It feels very gloomy up at the woodland end. It doesn’t feel like much can grow there."

“""
New things that people would like to do at Dunwood Park

Although people mentioned areas where Dunwood Park could be improved, the majority of current users love the park and what it offers them: 44% told us they say they can do all the things they want to there. This is testimony to the great variety of spaces in Dunwood Park – from the wild woodland, to open green spaces, to tennis courts, bowling green and a play area. This is a much richer choice of spaces than offered by most town parks.

However, some people would like the opportunity to do more things at Dunwood Park and gave suggestions. Given the need to encourage more people into Dunwood Park it is important to take note of these views and ideas. Of the 176 who gave their views on this part of the survey:

26% would like to have more and improved play facilities – with a focus on natural play and more adventurous play for older children. Suggestions included play equipment integrated into the woodlands, using felled trees to make places to play, a rope swing in the woods, climbing trees, dens, a dog free picnic area and a bigger space to play ball games.

19% of people want better facilities. They would like improvements made to the tennis courts, open and clean toilets, more seats and picnic tables, woodcarvings and outdoor art throughout the park.

11% of people would like a café. They felt it would be a good place to meet friends and would encourage them to stay longer in the park. Having somewhere to buy refreshments might make it easier for families with children to use the park. Many older people said a café would add to their enjoyment of the park.
What would improve Dunwood Park?

More suggestions came by asking people “What would improve Dunwood Park?” 247 people answered this part of the survey.

66% suggested a range of new and improved facilities. Suggestions included a bigger car park area, a bandstand, a cycle path at the top of the park, a shelter from the rain, more rubbish and dog bins, a pond and a nature walk.

In addition, several issues were raised again:

19% suggested better paths would improve the park.

17% of people told us that having more places to sit is important to them. More seats, especially at the Jubilee end of the park would give people somewhere to sit and stop rather than just walking through.

15% of people told us that a café or refreshment facilities would improve the park.

14% of people wanted to have lighting in part of the park to make them feel safer.

13% of people told us that better horticultural care was important – woodland management, creating wildlife habitats and having more flowers.

13% of people wanted better play facilities for children.
Assessing the quality of Dunwood Park

To bring a different perspective to the baseline user survey, Pathways conducted a focus group on November 30th. This event was called a ‘Spaceshaper workshop’. The purpose of the event was to bring together small group of users, to talk with them in depth and to jointly assess the quality of Dunwood Park. In this final section of the booklet, the workshop is explained and its results summarised. It is reassuring to note that the Spaceshaper workshop backs up the key findings from the wider user survey.

The event used Spaceshaper to structure the discussions around Dunwood Park. Spaceshaper is a nationally recognised toolkit developed by the Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment (CABE) that helps people measure the quality of open spaces and set priorities for their future.

Spaceshaper asks questions under eight headings and generates discussions about the quality of the space. The questions are:

1. Use:  
   *Is this a space that has lots of possible uses?*

2. Environment:  
   *Does this space welcome people by having the right facilities?*

3. Design:  
   *Has this space been well designed and made?*

4. Access:  
   *Is this space easy to find and easy to get around?*

5. You:  
   *Is this a space you like and enjoy?*

6. Community:  
   *Is this a space valued by its local community?*

7. Other People:  
   *Is this a space which helps different people do different things at the same time?*

8. Maintenance:  
   *Is this a space that is cared for and well maintained?*
**Who came to the event?**

During the user survey Pathways researchers asked people if they’d like to come to a workshop about the park. Everyone who expressed an interest was invited and 12 people booked. Despite heavy snow on the morning of the event, 9 people attended – which was just right for our small Bowling Club venue.

**What we found out**

→ **Use**

*Is this a space that has lots of possible uses?*

People expressed a range of views on how Dunwood Park is used currently. There are several zones in the park where people can do different things – they can play bowls or watch wildlife, read a book quietly or walk the dog. There is space for everyone. However, in the more natural zone you have to use your imagination to know what to do and people told us that this part of the park is used less as some people aren’t sure what to do there. They suggested people need ideas of how to use the wilder space and be shown the kind of activities that their children might do there for example. An education ranger would be great.

→ **Environment**

*Does this space welcome people by having the right facilities?*

At the Spaceshaper event there was a fairly low feeling about the welcoming nature of the park. The people who use it now enjoy it as it is but acknowledged that other people might need more facilities to help them get the most from their time at the park. For instance many people would like to be able to get a cup of tea when they visit. It was thought that refreshments might particularly help families to enjoy the park more.
Design

Has this space been well designed and made

A range of views were given about the design of the space ranging from positive to fairly critical. Overall the sense is that there is a design underpinning the park which basically works well. However, the playground feels cut off from the rest of the park and the bowling green area doesn’t link to the wild part. In general it was felt that visitors aren’t encouraged to explore the whole park.

In addition there is no signage about the car park and there are already times when visitors parking on the street causes congestion. If there is a push to encourage more people to come, walking to the park should be promoted. If more people come by car there will need to be extra car park space.

Access

Is this space easy to find and easy to get around?

At the Spaceshaper event the park scored highly on access. The central path makes getting around easy and also gives good disabled access to parts of the park. Once you are in the park it is fairly easy to navigate. However, driving along the main road you wouldn’t know the park was there and the Jubilee entrance feels like an alley rather than an entrance to a park. There is a general lack of signage throughout the park too.

You

Is this a space you like and enjoy?

Most people said Dunwood Park is a place they like and enjoy. It is a peaceful and natural place, like a tiny bit of countryside and being in the park makes people feel good. People told us that the different paths mean they can create a different journey everyday and being outdoors they see different things every day and every season. However, a mum told us that she doesn’t think that there is anything for children to do at the park.
Community
Is this a space valued by its local community?

A full range of views were expressed. It seems there is a small group of local people who use the park very regularly and who value the park hugely. However, there are people who live locally who never come or who don’t know where the park is. In general people told us they don’t see new faces at the park.

Other people
Is this a space which helps different people do different things at the same time?

It was felt that Dunwood Park is good at allowing different people to do different things at the same time. However, there is enough space and potential to absorb more people do a wider variety of activities in the park.

Maintenance
Is this a space that is cared for and well maintained?

Some participants at the event scored Dunwood Park highly on maintenance. This is because the state of the park reflects a lot of care – particularly by the park keeper. Other people scored the park lower in this area, acknowledging that some areas that need attention. For example: flooded paths, the desire to see more flowers and seasonal shrubs in the park and the need for woodland management.
In conclusion

The baseline user survey has gathered key information about who uses Dunwood Park now, what they do there and what they think of it. As work is done to increase the community’s use of Dunwood Park, the survey can be used to help measure change and progress.

The key findings of the baseline user survey however, will not be a surprise to anyone who knows Dunwood Park well. The sustained input by the Friends of Dunwood Park has already ensured that local people’s views have informed the programme of restoration. This means that many of the issues raised through the baseline user survey are set to be addressed.

Crucially though, the survey does show where effort to encourage more people to use the park should be focused. As such the survey could be useful in informing the work of the Council and the Friends of Dunwood Park over the next three years. The findings of the survey suggest that action planning and work could be focussed on the following areas:

- Delivering activities to attract more families and children to the park
- Attracting more young people into the park
- Making sure that more local people know about Dunwood Park and what it can offer them
- Considering what will help people to stay longer in the park and use it more often
- Making links with the BME community and working to help them use the park more

To measure progress around community use of the park, it would good practise to ensure a follow up user survey is conducted in three years time – perhaps by local volunteers.