



## Cabinet 1 February 2012

### Abbey Gardens, Bury St Edmunds: Application to Heritage Lottery Fund Parks for People Programme (Feb12/12)

#### 1. Summary and Reasons for Recommendations

- 1.1 Following the work undertaken by a Member steering group, the Borough Council adopted a management plan for Abbey Gardens in 2010. The management plan set out a number of aspirations for the future of the site, some of which required significant financial investment. In order to try and progress some of those aspirations and ensure that the Gardens remain a popular and well maintained venue, Officers investigated a range of possible funding sources. The only major source of external funding for improvements of the scale proposed in the Abbey Gardens is the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) Parks for People Programme. An initial bid for funding to the HLF was submitted in February 2011. Despite this initial bid being unsuccessful the Borough Council received some useful feedback, which will help inform a proposed future bid.
- 1.2 The HLF Parks for People scheme is a two-stage application process. The first stage application sets out the outline plans and funding estimates to complete the project. It also requests the funding necessary to consult on and draw together the more detailed feasibility works to inform the stage two applications. The application that the Borough Council made in February 2011, and is now re-making, is a stage one application. Stage one is highly competitive and despite our initial stage one bid being unsuccessful, the HLF was very supportive of the Borough Council trying again (see feedback in **Appendix 1 attached**).
- 1.3 The Borough Council, with help from the Friends of Abbey Gardens, conducted a consultation on the 10 December 2011 concerning the outline plans, which had been prepared for the stage one bid. Over 130 people were recorded attending the event, and the majority were broadly supportive of the proposals, although certain aspects were deemed more contentious.
- 1.4 This report sets out the contents of the proposed bid for consideration by the Cabinet.

#### 2. Recommendations

2.1 It is **RECOMMENDED** that:-

- (1) officers be authorised to pursue a stage one Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) Parks for People grant application for the works proposed in Abbey Gardens; and
- (2) subject to the bid being successful, a working party of Members is appointed to oversee the project through to completion.

### **3. Corporate Objectives**

3.1 The recommendations meet the following Corporate Priorities, as contained within the Corporate Plan:-

- (i) *'To improve the safety and well-being of the community';*
- (ii) *'To secure a sustainable and attractive environment';* and
- (iii) *'To raise corporate standards and efficiency'.*

Contact Details	Portfolio Holder	Lead Officer
Name	Sara Mildmay-White	Damien Parker
Telephone	(01359) 270580	(01284) 757090
E-mail	sara.mildmay-white@stedsbc.gov.uk	damien.parker@stedsbc.gov.uk

#### **4. The Parks for People Programme**

- 4.1 Parks for People is a joint Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) and Big Lottery (BIG) programme funded through the National Lottery for projects that regenerate public parks of national, regional or local heritage value in the UK. Grants are for both capital work, such as conservation, repair and new facilities, and for a wide range of activities, including new staff to organise and support them.
- 4.2 Parks for People has a two-stage application process. The first stage application sets out outline plans and costings, and requests the funding to make a stage two application to develop these outline plans fully. The application that the Borough Council submitted last February, and is now proposing to re-make, is a stage one application. Stage one is highly competitive but stage two is less so.
- 4.3 Parks for People projects must deliver the following five outcomes:-
- (a) increasing the range of audiences ( i.e. the range of people visiting the park);
  - (b) conserving and improving the heritage value;
  - (c) increasing the range of volunteers involved;
  - (d) improving skills and knowledge through learning and training; and
  - (e) improving management and maintenance.
- 4.4 The programme offers stage two grants of £250,000 to £5,000,000. There is no prescribed range for initial stage one development grants, but these usually seem to be between 10% to 20% of the full estimated project costs. For a grant of £1 million or more, the applicant must provide at least 10% of the project costs from their own or other sources.

#### **5. Background to bid and how the outline plans were developed**

- 5.1 Abbey Gardens is rich in historical, archaeological, architectural and garden heritage, is a popular public park with recreational facilities, and is an important social setting for collective community events. The proposed HLF bid aims to both physically and conceptually enhance and integrate these elements so that visitors to the park experience and understand them as complementary parts of a common landscape. Integral to this concept is the extension of Abbey Gardens to include Eastgate nursery and The Crankles, both part of the former monastic precinct, and enhancing the way in which the different parts of the site relate to and connect with each other. Much of the inspiration and many of the ideas stemmed from the Abbey Gardens management plan.
- 5.2 The proposed stage one application was developed with help from English Heritage, Suffolk County Council's Archaeology Department and various internal sections of the Borough Council. This bid takes into consideration the feedback received from the HLF on the earlier, unsuccessful bid, and the feedback from the Abbey Precinct stakeholder forum, which comprises of St Edmundsbury Cathedral, Bury Society and Bury St Edmunds Town Council, as well as from the above organisations.
- 5.3 Capital works proposed in the stage one bid are as follows:-
- (a) comprehensive interpretation of the site (including information panels, viewing platform, etc);
  - (b) conservation and repair of Abbey Gate and adjacent precinct wall;
  - (c) possibly relocated shop and information point;
  - (d) relocation of tennis courts to Eastgate, and sympathetic incorporation of this area

into the park as a whole. (Current tennis courts will be the site of archaeological investigation programme);

- (e) extension of new play space including the sympathetic interpretive post-excavation landscaping of former tennis courts;
- (f) opening up the historic Abbott's Bridge as a footpath access to the Gardens, linking to Eastgate;
- (g) development of the River Lark corridor so that it becomes a much more prominent feature of Abbey Gardens, offering better access for visitors, and introducing more varied habitats;
- (h) improvement of The Crankles to create a more accessible, and diverse natural environment;
- (i) improvement of access between the Great Churchyard and Abbey Gardens, including the possible opening up of an additional entrance from the Great Churchyard, and between Abbey Gardens and the River Lark footpath network, giving a sense of the wider context of the park;
- (j) improvement of the current path network within the park to improve access around the ruins and reduce ground erosion;
- (k) some reconfiguration of the water garden/bowling green/bowls hut area to open up vistas of the landscape as a whole, and provide easier access to the Cathedral, while retaining its current peaceful atmosphere. It is likely that a water feature of some kind will be retained;
- (l) improved base for volunteers and Rangers, including equipment storage;
- (m) introduction of more varied planting and maintenance regimes in the landscape as a whole, including the area of the ruins, introducing greater informality and diversity;
- (n) tree planting/replacement programme based on tree history and tree survey;
- (o) installation of automated irrigation and possibly a borehole system for the gardens to reduce costs and conserve water;
- (p) consistent good quality signage and park furniture throughout the park; and
- (q) consideration of removal or reduction of the aviaries along with greater emphasis on the natural wildlife potential of Abbey Gardens as a whole.

#### 5.4 Proposed activities include:-

- (a) archaeological investigation, excavation and interpretation programme, including substantial learning, training and volunteering opportunities, as well as excavation viewpoints and ongoing interpretation for all park visitors;
- (b) apprenticeships in garden/landscape work and in buildings conservation;
- (c) inclusive events, activities and opportunities for children, young people and families drawing on crafts people, artists, musicians, environmentalists and storytellers;

- (d) wide range of volunteering opportunities in nature conservation, gardening, supporting children's activities, developing the park shop; and
- (e) training and mentoring for the Borough Council's parks staff in working with the community, monitoring and evaluation, marketing and promotion.

## 5.5 Public Consultation

- (a) A number of the proposals have been developed over the last decade in various documents, including the Abbey Gardens Management Plan 1997, the Architectural Conservation Statement 2003, the Abbey Gardens Management Plans of 2010 and 2011 and in the comments and recommendations made by Greenspace in awarding a Green Flag to Abbey Gardens in 2010 and 2011. Professional input from a landscape architect specialising in historic landscapes has been essential in developing and communicating ideas.
- (b) The Borough Council, with help from the Friends of Abbey Gardens, conducted, a consultation event in the Athenaeum in Bury St Edmunds on the 10 December 2011 concerning the outline plans, which had been prepared for the proposed stage one bid. Over 130 people were recorded as attending the event and the majority were broadly supportive of the proposals, although certain aspects were deemed more contentious. In order to try and obtain peoples' views in a standardised manner, attendees to the consultation event were encouraged to complete a questionnaire. These same questionnaires were posted on the Borough Council's website and, in order to try and attract a wider age range of participants, children from St James Middle School were encouraged to complete questionnaires, as were students from West Suffolk College. A report of the consultation so far is attached as **Appendix 2**, which includes analysis and discussion of the 116 completed questionnaires, the many 'post-it' comments, contributions from the children of St James' School and the consultation with young people at West Suffolk College.

## 6. Next Steps: Timetable

- 6.1 Stage One application to be submitted end February 2012 and the result should be known in July 2012. Stage Two application submitted February 2014 and the result should be known in July 2014. If successful the project could run over three, 2014/2015 to 2016/2017.

## 7. Community impact

### 7.1 General

- (a) The objective of the Borough Council is to ensure that the Abbey Gardens remains a popular and well maintained visitor attraction.

### 7.2 Diversity and Equality Impact

- (a) There are no obvious diversity or equality issues to be considered as part of this grant application. Should the grant be successful it will enable projects which will improve access and interpretation around the Abbey Gardens all of which will take into consideration the requirements of the Disability Discrimination Act.

## 8. Sustainability Impact

- 8.1 A Sustainability Impact Assessment has been completed and no major adverse impacts were identified.

**9. Consultation**

9.1 The proposals set out in this report have already been subject to a public consultation on the 10 December 2011 at the Athenaeum in Bury St Edmunds (see Section 5.5 above) and have been developed in consultation with various bodies outlined in section 5 of this report. Should the stage one bid be successful more extensive public consultation will be pursued as part of the stage two process.

**10. Resource implications** *(including asset management implications)*

10.1 Stage One application for development costs to prepare a stage two application:-

Grant request to HLF : £185,000; and  
 Other contributions : £64,000 (£39,000 from English Heritage; £25,000 from Borough Council/other partners)  
**Total stage one costs : £249,000.**

10.2 Estimated stage two project delivery costs:-

Grant request to HLF : £ 2,500,000; and  
 Other contributions : £500,000.

(English Heritage £260,000;  
 Borough Council £75,000 [yet to be agreed but could include Section 106 funds and contributions from other parties]  
 Suffolk County Council Archaeological Services £61,000 [non-cash contribution];  
 Borough Council Heritage Services £15,000 [non-cash contribution]).

**Total stage two costs: £3,000,000 (Estimate).**

10.3 Should the grant application be successful it will enable the Council to address a number of capital improvements on site. The revenue cost of maintaining the Abbey Gardens post completion of the proposed scheme is not likely to change significantly and may even reduce slightly. Notwithstanding this, HLF will need to satisfy themselves that the Borough Council has the resources in place to adequately maintain the Abbey Gardens following completion of the project.

**11. Risk Assessment** *(potential hazards or opportunities affecting corporate, service or project objectives)*

11.1

Risk area	Inherent level of Risk  (before controls)	Controls	Residual Risk  (after controls)
Public tension concerning specific aspects of the scheme.  The site is a scheduled ancient monument site so there are restrictions on what can be done.	Medium	From the outset we've said we want to preserve what's best about the Abbey Gardens and improve upon or change those areas which are not perceived as being so good.  We've consulted experts in the field.  We have undertaken a certain amount of public consultation and more is planned as part of our stage two bid.	Low

		Friends of Abbey Gardens and regular volunteer sessions are now in place.	
Public Apathy; The timescales involved in a scheme of this type are long.  Some members of the community who do not get exactly what they want out of the scheme may feel that their opinions have been ignored.	Medium	We will aim to manage expectations by being transparent about timescales from the outset.  We will aim to provide feedback through the friends meetings about the rationale for the decisions made regarding the bid.	Low

## 12. Legal or policy implications

12.1 Officers are mindful of the various legal requirements associated with the management of Parks and Open Spaces, and will seek legal advice prior to committing to any agreements with the HLF.

<b>Wards affected</b>	All	<b>Portfolio Holders</b>	Culture and Sport
<b>Background Papers</b>	Nil	<b>Subject Area</b>	Leisure, Sport, Arts and Culture

W:\Democratic WP Services\Committee\Reports\Cabinet\2012\12.02.01\C327 Abbey Gardens-Application to Heritage Lottery Fund Parks for People Programme.doc

## **HLF FEEDBACK ON OUR INITIAL STAGE ONE APPLICATION**

### **Positives**

In general, the content of the application was regarded as good and appropriate for the Parks for People programme.

- Recognised and liked the high heritage value of the application
- Liked the proposal to expand the Abbey Gardens boundaries to include the former Eastgate Nursery and the Crankles.
- In general liked the proposals for the physical changes (excepting café – they questioned the proposal to convert the existing refreshments kiosk into a sit down café given the existence of the Cathedral café within the precinct).
- In general liked the 'activities' proposals.
- Apprenticeships and trainee proposals well regarded.
- Archaeological investigation well regarded – referred to as 'one of the wow factors.'

### **Suggestions for improvement**

Suggestions for improvement focused on the process of shaping the proposals, demonstration of council commitment and advice about presentation.

- Need to demonstrate that a range of people and organisations involved in the planning process for the stage one application. In particular, they would want to see evidence of input to the stage one application from park users, the Friends' Group and volunteers rather than just potential input at the stage two development phase.
- More needed on the strengthening of the relationship with the Cathedral, given that the Cathedral shares the monastic precinct.
- They referred to the 'changing demographics' of Bury St Edmunds and whether/how new groups of people might be drawn into the early planning stages, including the stage one planning of the archaeological programme.
- The proposal should demonstrate more strongly SEBC's maintenance commitment to the park and should also emphasise possible alternative additional maintenance contributions, such as through volunteers. They wanted to see evidence of real council commitment to the project in terms of its long term sustainability ( post Parks for People funding).



In terms of presentation, less reference to 'potential' and greater focus on what was already happening. This should include things that have happened since the last submission such as: the establishing of the Friends' Group; the increasing involvement of volunteers; the people counter validated visitor figures; the new play area ; new landscape and horticultural apprenticeships; second year of achievement of Green Flag status with improved scoring - as well as to the park's considerable pre-existing strengths.

Clearer and more detailed presentation of figures to remove ambiguity (for example presentation of conservation management plan costs and capital costs associated with café, staff and volunteer base, interpretation hub etc.)

### **Comments in relation to our Costs of project and level of grant applied for:**

The size of the project and the grant being requested were substantially more than any of the nine successful applicants who were granted £13.5million between them. Our bid was for just under £4,000,000 the next nearest bid was for around £2,500,000.

HLF's comments were:

- They were not specifically recommending that we should reduce our proposals – quality more important than cost and there was no element of the project that was thought inappropriate (with the possible exception of the sit down café).
- In general they would have liked to see more partnership funding.

However, our view is that we must bring down the overall estimated cost of the project and of the amount of grant requested and keep the partnership funding at least the same level – preferably more.

## REPORT ON CONSULTATION ON THE HERITAGE LOTTERY FUND PROPOSALS FOR ABBEY GARDENS

### *'Abbey Gardens belongs to Bury St Edmunds and makes us special'*

This report draws together the results of the consultation conducted on 10 December 2010, subsequent questionnaires submitted on-line and by post, questionnaires collected during consultation with young adults conducted at West Suffolk College, the comments and views expressed by ten students at St James Middle School, the formal response from the Cathedral, feedback from Suffolk County Council Archaeological Service following their presence at 10 December consultation day and other individual submissions.

#### **How the consultation day on 10 December was publicised**

Information about the consultation day was widely disseminated, with leaflets going home with all primary school children in BSE, cover in the Bury Free press and on Radio Suffolk, leaflets available from Abbey Gardens itself and the cathedral, dissemination to all immediately neighbouring streets and to residents' associations.

#### **Who attended and the content and quality of the event**

***A well presented exhibition with your aims explained clearly and sympathetically; we have to 'get it right' as it has to last at least the next 50 years!***

The consultation was a drop-in event, held at the centrally located Athenaeum on Angel Hill, Bury St Edmunds. Consultation on the physical proposals for Abbey Gardens centred on three very large displays focussing respectively on 'key strengths and opportunities', 'key priorities for change' and the 'zoning and visioning plan'.

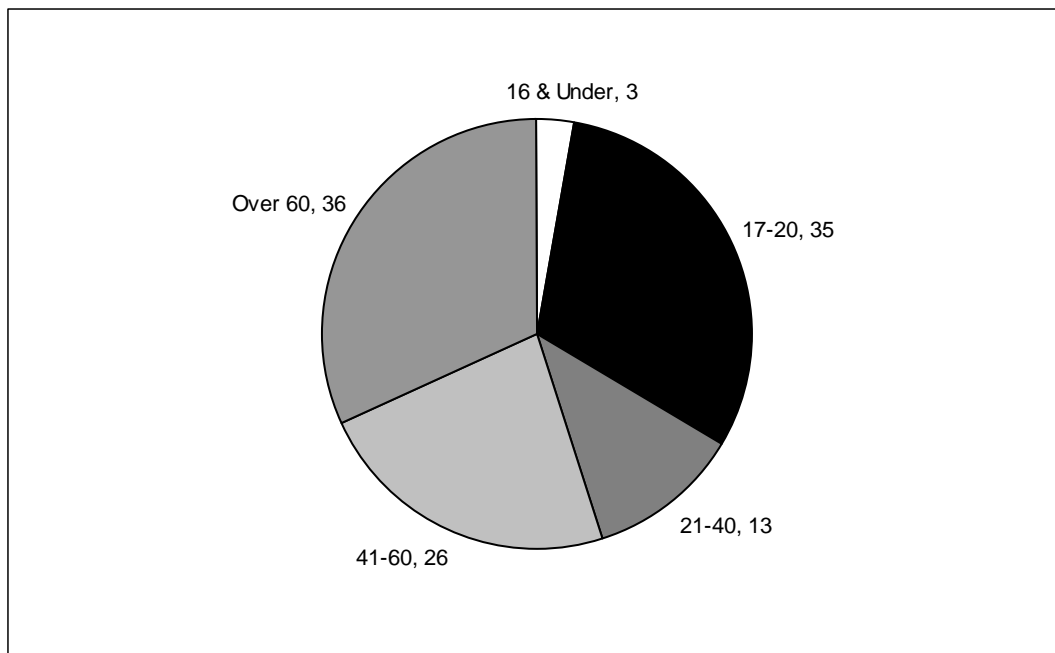
In addition, SEBC Heritage Services mounted a display of photographs, books and objects as well as a rolling slide show on the history of Abbey Gardens with opportunities for people to reminisce and share their own memories. SCC Archaeological Services presented comprehensive information about the proposed archaeological programme which forms part of the HLF proposals, with many examples of similar work, objects that could be handled and opportunities for children to do some hands on discovery and excavation. A representative from English Heritage was present throughout the day. The Friends and Volunteers of Abbey Gardens organised a stall of information explaining their aims and what they do and were proactive in making contact with every visitor. There was a play corner and Christmas activities for children, tea, coffee and cakes available throughout the day and lovely music made with ukulele, flute and voice by musicians from King Edward V1 Upper School.

The event was well staffed and facilitated by SSCAS staff, SEBC Heritage Services Collections Manager, Friends and Volunteers of Abbey Gardens and SEBC parks staff. The day was very well attended for an event of this kind, by 126 plus people, almost all of them (as might be expected) living locally. Most importantly, people stayed for long periods of time, seemed to enjoy themselves and genuinely engaged with the proposals, making many very valuable comments and suggestions.

An important theme that emerged from the consultation was how greatly Abbey Gardens is valued . While a very few people were opposed to any change, the vast majority felt that changes were needed, but that care should be taken to respect and preserve Abbey Gardens' special qualities and atmosphere.

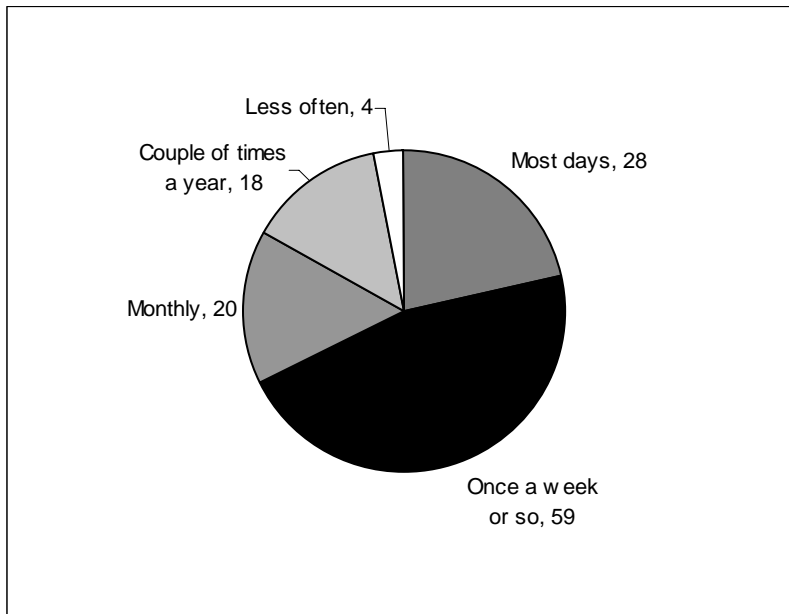
### **ANALYSIS OF QUESTIONNAIRES**

**53** questionnaires were filled in on the day itself with **26** more submitted later. People who attended the consultation also had the opportunity to make comments relating to the three display boards using post-its instead of or in addition to filling in questionnaires. Consideration of the post-it comments is included in the general discussion. A consultation session was organised by the Abbey Gardens Gardening Team at West Suffolk College and **37** questionnaires filled in.**116** questionnaires were analysed altogether. Consultation was also carried out with a group of students at St James Middle School.



## Frequency of visits to Abbey Gardens

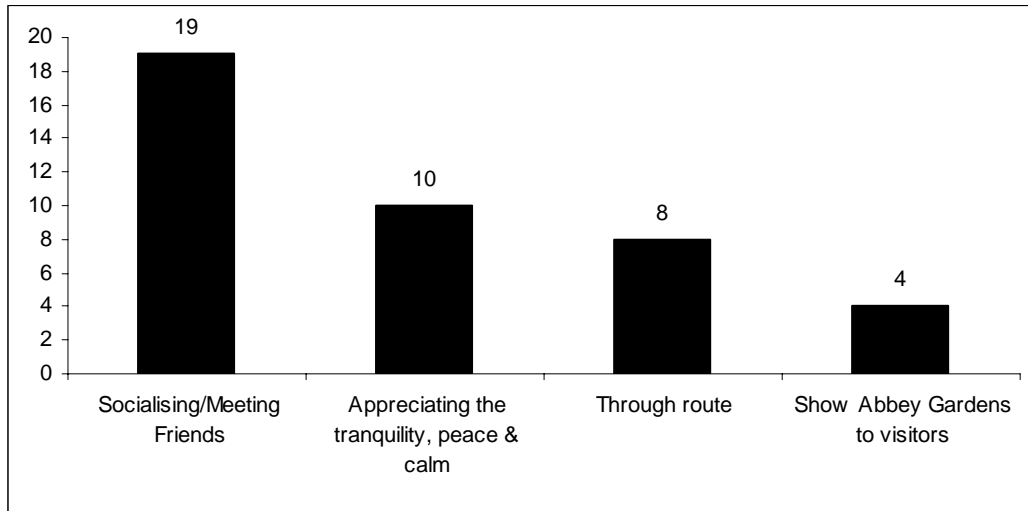
The majority of respondents were frequent visitors with 87 of the 116 respondents visiting the Gardens at least once a week.



## Reasons for visiting the gardens

Respondents could tick as many 'reasons' as they liked. All gave multiple reasons

The main other reasons in order of popularity included:



## **The three things you like most about the Gardens**

The things that people liked most that attracted more than one comment were as follows.

## **The three things you like least about the Gardens**

The things that people liked least that attracted more than one comment were as follows.

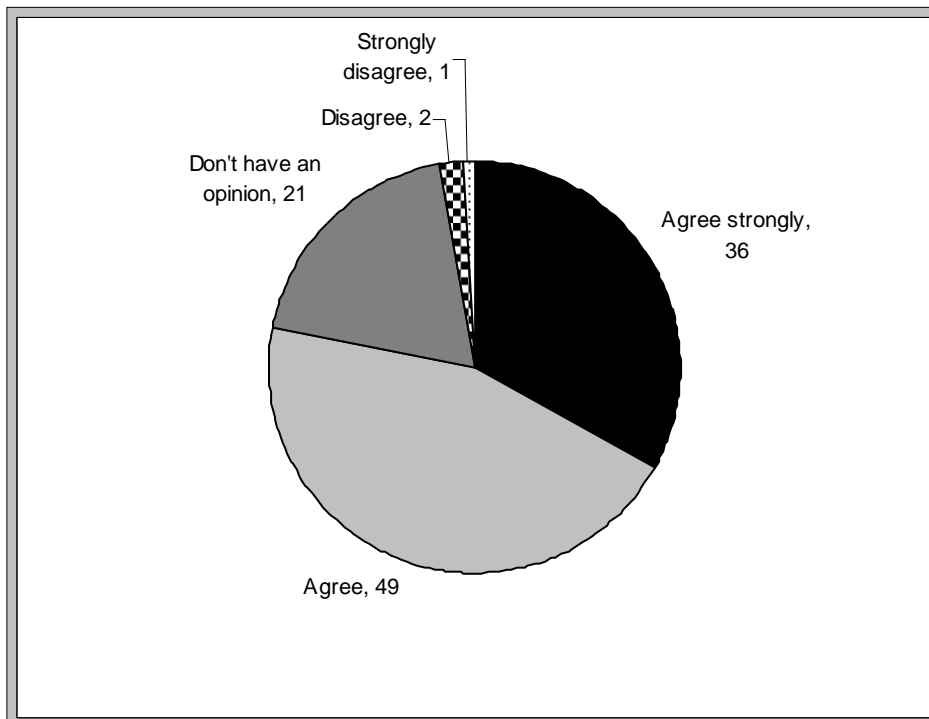
It should be noted that there were many more 'things liked best' than 'things liked least' comments.

## What would you most like to change?

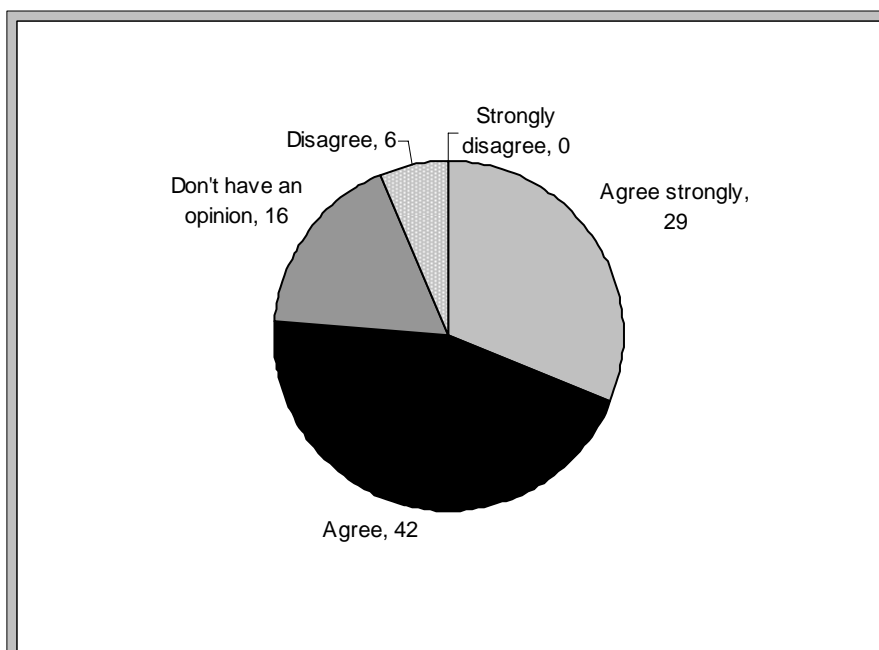
The things that people said they'd most like to change were quite disparate. Responses that fell into groups are noted below and significant comments are included in the section headed 'other issues arising from the consultation'.

### COMMENTS ON DISPLAY BOARDS

#### 'Key strengths and opportunities' 'Key priorities for change' 'Zoning and visioning plan'

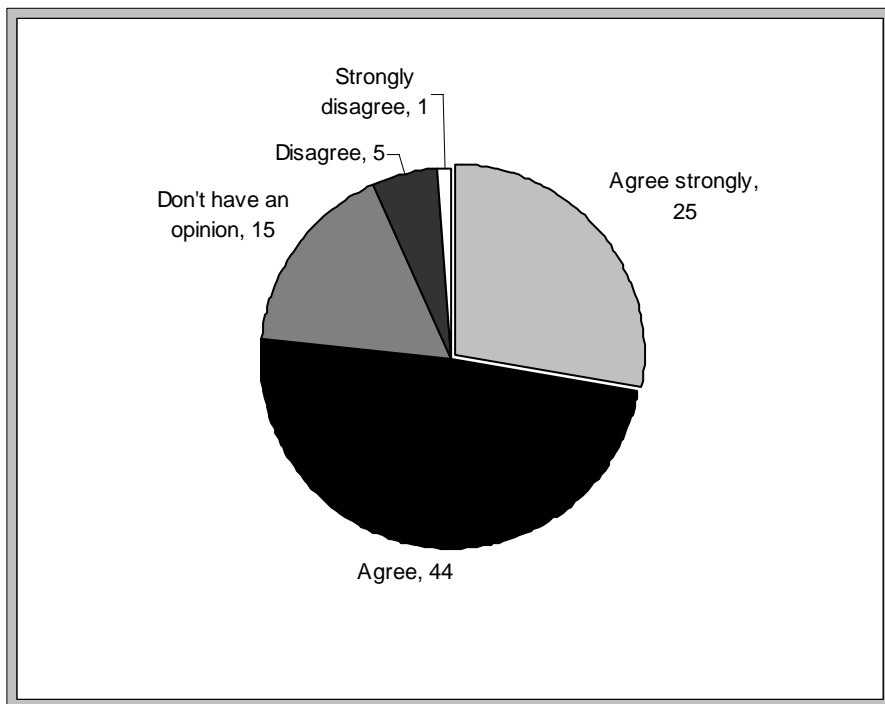


#### Key priorities for change





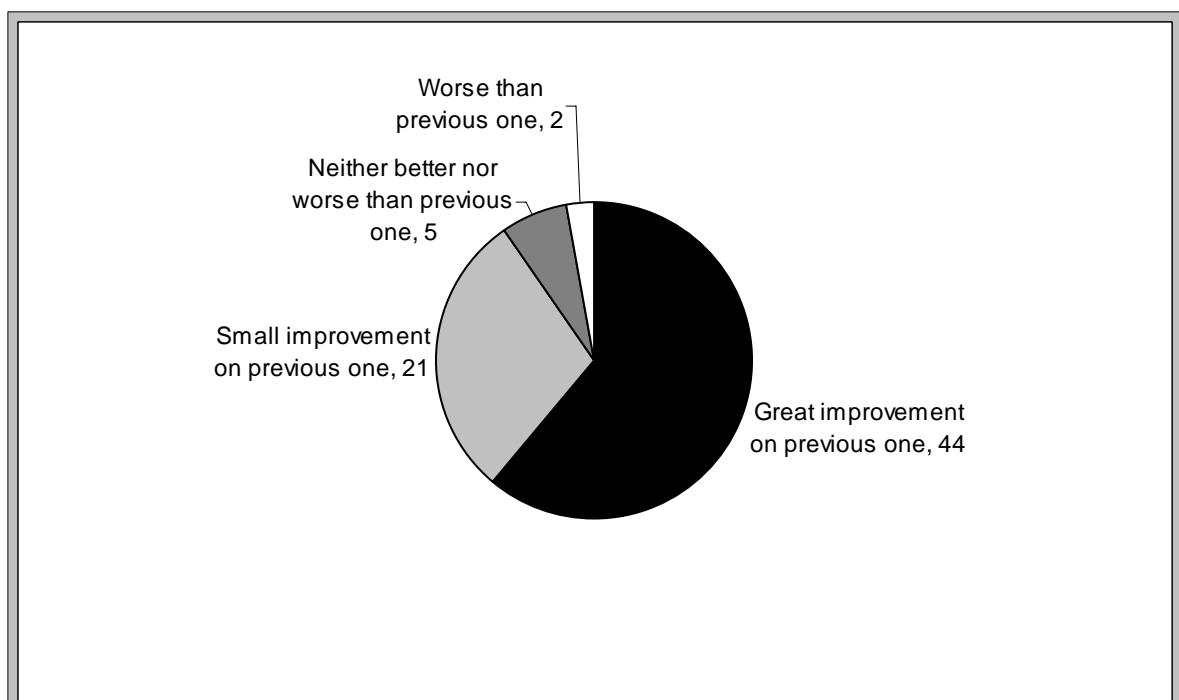
## Zoning and visioning plan



## Views on new play space

*It allows children more space to be creative especially the sand pit. Even as a 68 year old it was great to do the tree walk just once.*

*Aesthetically it looks far better, very welcoming and natural. Safer for the children and a wider range of activities (17 - 21 year old)*



There was appreciation of the aesthetic qualities of the new play area, the way in which it blends with its setting and the more creative and engaging play opportunities offered by the sand and water, with a call to enlarge this area.

There was a strong desire expressed –especially by the 9- 13 year old middle school students – for the addition of more challenging play opportunities for older children.

## Discussion

The discussion below includes consideration of the post-it note comments as well as the questionnaire responses, of the consultation with the children of St James' Middle School and of the individual submissions received

There is clear broad general agreement for the many of the proposals and this is reflected also in respondents' own likes, dislikes and priorities for change. The new footpath link across Abbott's Bridge; extending Abbey Gardens to include Eastgate Nursery and The Crankles; improvements and increased accessibility to the River Lark; introduction of less formal mowing, planting and maintenance regimes to parts of the grounds encouraging increased diversity of habitats and wildlife; relocation of tennis courts; more interpretation and information especially with regard to the Abbey ruins; relocation of the existing shop/Rangers' base to create better information and shop facilities and also to improve connection with and access to the cathedral and cathedral café; improvement of the quality and access to the River Lark; conservation of stone work and better access to the ruins; adding more seasonal interest to formal beds all met with virtually unanimous support and approval plus many useful detailed suggestions.

There is further analysis below on the questionnaire responses of the young adults, and discussion of the more debated issues including cafe facilities , the bowling green/water garden complex, the aviaries , the question of a bandstand. In addition a number of miscellaneous points are noted.

### **Young adults**

#### ***it's cool - a good place to hang out***

While young adults are a definite presence at Abbey Gardens, they are less frequent visitors than older people. What became clear from their questionnaire responses was that in some respects they use Abbey Gardens in a different way from older people. For them, it is very much a meeting up place. The 19 people who named '*meeting friends*' among their reasons for going to Abbey Gardens were all in the 17 - 21 age group. It was also clear from their responses that although they might go to Abbey Gardens less often than older people, once there, since their purpose is to be with other people, they stay for longer periods of time.

For this reason, some of their concerns are different. This age group alone said they wanted more toilets and more sheltered places to sit when it's raining. A number of them specified that they would like these 'dotted about' and there was no call for segregated areas. They were concerned about the poor cafe facilities - namely the fact that it's opening hours are erratic and that what it provides is limited ( no burgers ). We should note too that this was the only age group that said that the fact that Abbey Gardens was free was one of the things that they liked best.

This age group enjoy the events in the Gardens and would like more opportunities for and a greater range of performance and live events, including participatory ones.

***a busking area for music and small scale entertainment(singing, dancing)***

***open mic***

***an open air cinema with new popular films would be a good idea. I would visit that***

Several in this age group said they would like 'more things to do.' While some of the ideas would be inappropriate for Abbey Gardens and are outside the remit of this project ( 'mini go ape', outdoor swimming pool, astroturf pitches ) others, such as outdoor tennis tables, an outdoor gym and places for informal ball games could be explored further. Some young adults and children dislike the fact that cycling and skating are forbidden in the Gardens. It could be worth considering having particular times in the Gardens and/or in the town when paths and streets are given over to skaters and cyclists ( as happens on Friday evenings in many French towns - including Paris).

Many of these things could be investigated and organised by young adults themselves, given a positive attitude from SEBC. Three of the respondents have said they'd like to join the Friends of Abbey Gardens, and this could be a possible vehicle for their active involvement in the development of the park.

It's important to emphasise also the degree of agreement across age groups. Although more people in the 17 - 21 age group had 'no opinion' on the consultation display boards, the majority of them 'strongly agreed or 'agreed' with the proposals. They appreciated the peaceful and relaxing atmosphere of the Gardens, its aesthetic qualities and the fact that it's well looked after - they were the only age group to list among the things they liked that it was ' clean, tidy and well kept.'

Their responses to the section of the questionnaire on the new play area was difficult to interpret in that some had clearly answered it from the point of view of young children, while others from the point of themselves and its lack of provision for older teenagers - unsurprising as it had not been designed for this age group. Perhaps, just as we are looking at the 'playability' and interest of the whole space to children, we should also be looking at the potential of the whole space, in terms of interesting features, for young adults.

## **Café**

While there's general agreement that the existing refreshment kiosk is poor quality and inadequate there are differing opinions about the best solution. There was some dislike of the idea of a pop - up facility and also of its possible location as shown on the plan. Some respondents have said that they would like a proper sit down café with both indoor and outdoor facilities. However, this option has really been ruled out by the HLF who have stated that they would be very unlikely to support such a proposal given its cost and the existence of the cathedral café within the abbey precinct. The cathedral itself is supportive of this approach. Several respondents suggested that instead of a pop-up the existing refreshment kiosk should be retained and improved. Some respondents have pointed out that the cathedral café is not open on Sundays - an obvious disadvantage in the Gardens.

*The pre-existing Abbey Gardens catering contract came to an end in Autumn 2011. A different company has now won the contract which includes a condition of flexibility depending on the requirements of a successful HLF bid.*

## **Aviaries**

As can be seen from the analysis of the questionnaires, a number of respondents listed the aviaries among their 'least liked' things. While those supporting the retention of the aviaries often quoted their importance for children ( and this may well be true for very young children), children from St James Middle School ( aged 9 – 13) while liking and wanting more 'wildlife' in Abbey Gardens, disliked the aviaries and this was true too of the 17 - 21 age group. Younger people in particular, but also many older people do not now appear to want to see wildlife in captivity.

However, the post-it comments included a number in favour of keeping or replacing the aviaries and for some people they are very precious. While these people are definitely in a minority, their views and feelings are strong.

Proposals to increase the diversity of habitats and wildlife in Abbey Gardens are generally well supported and if this occurred , accompanied by good interpretation, this could be seen as some compensation for the loss of the aviaries. Advice has been sought from the RSPB and the British Trust for Ornithology on this.

## ***Bowling Green***

While there is only limited support for the bowling green as it stands, there are different reasons for these views and different solutions suggested. It's acknowledged that the bowling green is underused; however the space that it occupies, with its perimeter seating, is valued as a quiet peaceful area to sit alone or with friends. For some people, bowling is seen as intrinsically unappealing, especially to younger people. For others, underuse is seen as the result of lack of promotion and poor maintenance of the green. St Edmundsbury Bowls Club is a private bowling club within the Abbey precincts. This club would welcome new members and discussions will take place between the club and SEBC about the possibility of the club providing periodic open access taster sessions.

## ***Water Garden***

While there appears to be general agreement that the 'bus shelters' at each end of the water garden should go, the water garden itself rouses strong feelings both for and against. As with the bowling green ( and as part of the same complex) the peace , seclusion and tranquillity of the space is highly valued. However, its very seclusion in some people's eyes makes the water garden a particular hazard.

The water garden was originally unfenced and generally accessible. The drowning of a young child in it in 1964 ( there is a plaque to the child on the site) resulted in the area being fenced, with padlocked gates only one of which is unlocked. Its resulting inaccessibility is disliked by many. In addition both the 'bus shelters' and the overgrown planting block the potentially wonderful views from this high point.

However, many people want to keep a water garden or water feature rather than **the** water garden, favouring a feature that does not involve standing water.

## ***Bandstand***

A specific campaign has arisen to include a bandstand in the HLF proposals. However, there is no evidence of widespread general support for a bandstand and our understanding is that previous efforts on this front did not meet with support from English Heritage . The recently built open sided Gathering Place ( adjacent to the play area) was only accepted by EH on the grounds that it had a removeable canvas roof. The general principle of encouraging performance of many kinds is supported by the existence of the Gathering Place ( which with its roof can accommodate groups/bands of up to 25/30 ), the inclusion of outside electricity points in the events and Cloisters areas and the availability of pop up marquees from SEBC.

## **OTHER ISSUES ARISING FROM THE CONSULTATION**

Text in italics indicates direct quotes from respondents

Respondents raised a number of other points and issues that should be considered or that require feedback.

### **Relocation of toilets**

A number of people would like additional toilets, or the relocation of toilets nearer the play area. However, Abbey Gardens has relatively recently acquired a new high quality award winning toilet block. This was built near the main Abbey Gate entrance so that it could serve both the town and the Gardens. The HLF Parks for People programme does not prioritise new buildings. For all these reasons, it would not be appropriate to include either the relocation or addition of toilets in these proposals.

### **Tennis courts**

*If the tennis courts are relocated, it will be important to ensure that the old ones don't go before the new ones are available.*

### **Flat parkland area**

*Not keen on idea of having the flat area of grass as meadow – it's the one space the older children have for ball games.*

### **Incorporating Eastgate Nursery into Abbey Gardens**

Overall support for this, but need to ensure security and access for St Edmundsbury Bowls club which would then fall within the area of Abbey Gardens. Also possible parking issues for Bowls club, which under an informal agreement currently uses the Eastgate Nursery site for parking.

### **Extra entrance to Abbey Gardens from the Great Churchyard**

Quote from letter from Sarah Friswell, St Edmundsbury Cathedral

*The only point which we would like to highlight as a potential area of concern for the Cathedral is the increased access via the Great Churchyard, between the two properties which belong to the Cathedral. It is unlikely that this will become a major entrance/exit. However increased pedestrian access will raise issues of privacy for the two Cathedral properties, in particular 1 Abbey Precincts. A simple screen or fence may be a solution.*

A resident of Abbey Precincts, while recognising that the privacy of residents of 1 Abbey precincts would need to be protected, was in favour of this additional entrance on the grounds that it could make Abbey Precincts less secluded and therefore safer.

## **River Lark**

*Please reinstate duck walks which are in disrepair*

## **Approaches to Abbey Gardens**

A number of points were raised by respondents about getting to and getting into Abbey Gardens.

- *I suggest that pedestrian priority route needed at Abbeygate St – Angel Hill – Abbey Gardens. Or road closure to through traffic on Angel Hill at certain times*
- *Access to Abbeygate Tower and improvement of the actual entrance through Abbeygate.*
- *Safer crossing from the Ram Meadow , the nearest large car park.A crossing located near The Fox on the straight part of the Mustow St/Eastgate St where most people arrive having parked and walked through the Fox car park who could then cross safely. The road here is narrower rather than opposite the Abbey Gardens gates where the road is not only much wider but is also opposite a busy junction. It would be a great improvement to access the gardens via the Lark close to the historic bridge making a prettier entrance bringing everyone over the river and into the gardens via an attractive bridge. The view on arrival would be of the whole gardens in all their glory, a vantage point with the gardens laid out in front of you rather than the noise of the road and hassle of crossing.*

## **Future involvement**

It was gratifying that so many people are feeling engaged with this project, almost everyone wanting to be kept in touch and many wanting to get actively involved and/or to join the Friends of Abbey Gardens

## ***The Friends of Abbey Gardens***

The Abbey Gardens Friends and Volunteers contributed enormously to the consultation day, both in terms of general preparation and support and also by raising awareness of the Friends Group by having information available and proactively making contact with everyone who attended, recruiting many new members. 75 people ( including three young people) registered themselves as having an interest in becoming or remaining a Friend, choosing whether they were interested in being a committee member, a 'support friend' ( being kept in touch with occasional active involvement) a volunteer in the Gardens or in special projects such as updating the tree survey , researching the history of Abbey and getting involved in planning the celebrations of the centenary of Abbey Gardens as a public park ( July, 2012).



## **ARCHAEOLOGICAL INVESTIGATION, EXCAVATION AND INTERPRETATION PROGRAMME**

Jo Caruth of Suffolk County Council Archaeological Service provided the following feedback after the consultation day

*The feedback we got was that people liked the idea of an excavation and were keen to be involved and/or to view the work (although lots of people emphasized that they were concerned it should be carried out by professionals, so we had to reassure them that it would be under professional supervision!) They would like a book summarising the archaeological work of Bury (something we had costed for in the original quote but removed in that first round of cutting back) and/or would like to see photos and reports on what we've done in the past.*

*People loved the old photos that Keith Cunliffe ( SEBC Heritage Service) put up...which does make me think that we ought to find some way of displaying these - maybe even in a picture book that could be sold? Talking to the maths teacher made us realise how much more we could push the multi-disciplinary benefits of the archaeological work (e.g. use of Pythagoras, geometry etc in recording and surveying) and maybe this could be added to the training/education benefits of other elements too.*

## **CATHEDRAL RESPONSE**

*Friday 16 December 2011*

*Dear Damien*

*On behalf of St Edmundsbury Cathedral, I am writing to express our thanks for the opportunity of being involved in the consultation over the future development of the Abbey Gardens. We are very keen to see the planned proposals as any development of the Abbey site will undoubtedly impact on the Cathedral. It is vital that we work in partnership with St Edmundsbury Borough Council and other key partners to ensure that this important site remains accessible to all and offers a range of amenities to serve the community and visitors alike. We are grateful for the current collaborative relationship, which includes the sharing of the gardening duties in the Pilgrims' Herb Garden, as well as co-operation over major events.*

*We welcome the new proposals, in particular the improvements to the interpretation of the history of the site. There are some exciting possibilities for further archeological investigation.*

*We understand that there are plans to improve the catering outlet in the Abbey Gardens, but if this is only to the extent of improving the existing kiosk, we do not perceive this as being a*

*threat to the Cathedral Refectory, which operates 6 days a week and offers full licensed restaurant and café facilities for up to 80 people. Indeed we welcome the comments suggesting that access/links to the Refectory could be improved.*

*The only point which we would like to highlight as a potential area of concern for the Cathedral is the increased access via the Great Churchyard, between the two properties which belong to the Cathedral. It is unlikely that this will become a major entrance/exit. However increased pedestrian access will raise issues of privacy for the two Cathedral properties, in particular 1 Abbey Precincts. A simple screen or fence may be a solution.*

*We hope that these comments are useful.*

*Yours sincerely*

*Sarah Friswell*

W:\Democratic WP Services\Committee\Reports\Cabinet\2012\12.02.01\C327 Abbey Gardens-Application to Heritage Lottery Fund Parks for People Programme - Apps1&2.doc