

**Community Consultation
Review of Harlow's paddling pools
Report of findings**



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Summary of Findings

This section provides a short summary of key findings from the consultation process under two headings:

- A) Community consultation and engagement
- B) Children and young people consultation and engagement

A) Community Consultation and Engagement

Residents Household Survey

It total 1,376 surveys were completed.

Value, Heritage and Benefits

- A very large majority of respondents think that the paddling pools and splash park are very important for Harlow's children, young people, their families and the wider community. On a scale of 1 to 10 (ten being very important) the average score was 9.6.
- 76% strongly agree and an additional 16% agree that that the paddling pools are an important part of Harlow's heritage.
- A very large proportion of respondents (over 85%) noted the main benefits of Harlow's water play facilities as being: they are free to use; they provide a place for children and young people to meet friends and to socialise; they provide a popular opportunity for family outings, picnics etc; they provide an opportunity for children to take informal exercise that is fun, in an outdoor environment.

Future Development of Paddling Pools/Splash Parks

- A majority (56.5%) supported the view that the Council should "retain all the facilities as they currently are, making improvements and necessary repairs to bring them up to standard".
- Only 8% thought that the Council should "provide splash parks at all of the current sites instead of paddling pools".
- However, a significant minority (35.5%) thought that the Council should "make individual choices for each site".
- When asked about their view on the development of individual sites, other than for the Potter Street a majority of respondents noted that their preference was for a paddling pool facility, most notably for: Harlow Town Park (70%); Norman Booth (65%); Sumners (61%)
- The exception was Potter Street where 50% reported their preference for a Splash Park compared to 28% for a paddling pool.

Use and Quality

- Over 92% of respondents reported that members of their household visit or make use of at least one of Harlow's water play facilities during the summer.
- The sites that the greatest proportion of respondents reported having visited most were: Harlow Town Park Paddling Pool (34.8%); Norman Booth Paddling Pool (34.3%); and Sumners Paddling Pool (26.8%)
- Respondents generally reported that the site they used most was also their nearest but for three facilities this was not the case: Bush Fair Paddling Pool; Staple Tye Paddling Pool; and Potter Street Splash Park.
- Four of the sites were rated highly in terms of quality: Norman Booth Paddling Pool; Sumners Paddling Pool; Potter Street Splash Park; and Harlow Town Park Paddling Pool.

- The two sites that were rated less well were: Staple Tye Paddling Pool and Bush Fair Paddling Pool.
- As regards improvements, the most common suggestion by far was that toilets should be provided near to the facilities.

Access

- Users of the pools at Bush Fair and Staple Tye tend to be local to these pools – travelling 10 minutes or less to make use of the facilities.
- By contrast many users travel significantly further to make use of the pools at Norman Booth, Town Park and Sumners.
- With the exception of Bush Fair, the majority of users report driving to visit the water play facilities. Our work elsewhere across the country tells us that the most common method of accessing local play facilities is by foot/cycle and this tends to suggest that in general the water play facilities are “destination” facilities for family visits as well as play facilities visited independently by children and young people.
- Just over 87% of respondents reported that distance and time is not a barrier to making visits but 13% reported that it is.
- The most common areas where residents suggested there may be a need for a more local water play facility were the Church Langley and Newhall areas.

Community Organisations Survey

Value, Heritage and Quality

- All of the local groups rated the paddling pools and splash parks as being “very important” for Harlow’s children, young people, their families and the wider community.
- All of the groups “strongly agree” that the paddling pools are an important part of Harlow’s heritage.
- Norman Booth and the Town Park paddling pools are particularly highly rated in terms of quality.

Future Development

- A majority of the local groups would like the Council to make individual choices for each site (splash park, paddling pool or a combination).
- One suggestion was to make choices for individual areas, following further consultation with the local communities to seek their views.
- Groups noted that all the paddling pools require renovating and ideally facilities added such as toilets.
- Need to ensure there are adequate changing and toilet facilities for people with disabilities.
- It would be useful to have a special needs afternoon session available for families.

Face to Face Meetings

In the main the meetings reinforced the views already expressed in earlier sections – some additional points of note were:

- Overall, the Town Park Users Group (TPUG) view was that the Town Park paddling pool should remain, but with improved facilities, including, perhaps, an additional adjoining splash park – but that toilets nearby are the priority.
- TPUG also noted that with many residents not being familiar with Potter Street, introducing a splash park into the Town Park before proceeding with changes to other sites, could familiarise the

community with what type of facility a splash park is and enable a more informed view to be developed as to their desirability or otherwise at the other sites.

- The key message from PACT (Parents and Children Together) for Autism was that there is no uniform solution, and provision should be varied to take account of local circumstances and needs, and to offer variety across Harlow. They also emphasised the need for toilets, changing rooms and nearby parking.
- Tye Green Community Centre staff noted that toilets are essential, and a kiosk (perhaps a concession) would be desirable. They also suggested that it was important to have further local input into any specific proposals involving the future of Bush Fair paddling pool - be it upgrade, or a new facility.
- Harlow Childminders noted that shade is also very important and is lacking in general.
- The Petition Organiser group emphasised that the paddling pool sites had all year-round use as the empty pools were used for play, particularly for skateboarding, roller skating, BMX etc; and that the pools provide an early introduction to water for young children and help with confidence in water and an introduction to swimming. They expressed hope that the Council would be guided by the findings of the consultation.

Ward Councillor Comments

- All of the ward councillors who responded to the invitation to provide initial thoughts on the paddling pools review expressed the view that the water play facilities were of great community value and were part of Harlow's heritage; and that it was important for them to be retained and improved.
- Church Langley was mentioned as an area where an additional water play facility would be welcome (in the right location).
- It was further mentioned that Norman Booth is centrally located for Newhall and Gilden Park but given the forecast population growth the developers could perhaps be encouraged to provide another pool.
- One councillor noted that it would be 'nice' to have more water play facilities but given the expense more may be difficult to justify; and another highlighted that having a better understanding of maintenance issues and costs involved is important.
- A number of council members emphasised that future development should largely be shaped by the community consultation.

B) Children and young people engagement

From working with the children and young people, speaking with parents and families and from the children's survey it is possible to make the following broad observations:

- children and young people affirmed a great pleasure in water play and their access to the paddling pools – it's clearly something they feel strongly about
- there is a very strong sense in the community of the value of the paddling pools to family life in Harlow
- great importance is attached to the warm memories people have of themselves playing in the paddling pools, then their own children and grandchildren
- there is a pride in the paddling pools, as a resource most towns don't have
- there is some interest in developing splash parks, perhaps particularly among younger people. Discussions suggest that many people are unsure what a splash park would in fact be like, and do not want to lose the familiar paddling pools they already have
- most people were very supportive of the role of the attendants

- people frequently made the point that the paddling pools are a free resource and as such of great value to families
- many people use the pools regularly, meet with friends and family and take picnics
- the paddling pools are also in frequent use when empty, with children and young people using them to play and run about in, or for bike/BMX, rollerskating and skateboarding and other play activities
- again and again, from all groups, the lack of toilets by the paddling pools was mentioned, and this is seen as the most important improvement

However, talking to the disabled children attending Sam's Place (a playscheme for disabled children and young people) it was clear there were some specific problems:

- only a minority of the disabled children had ever visited any of the pools, and not one attended regularly
- staff confirmed the lack of toilets as a significant barrier to disabled children.

1. Introduction and Background

1.1 Background

Harlow Council runs five free-to-use outdoor paddling pools during the six-week school summer holidays. These are located at Sumners, Staple Tye, Bush Fair, the Town Park and Old Harlow (Norman Booth). In addition, the Council runs a small splash park located in Potter Street.

In July 2018, due to their age and deteriorating condition, the Council announced plans to consider replacing the paddling pools with new splash parks which could be built on the existing paddling pool sites. The Council has already allocated funding to support its plans and will allocate additional funds to the project in the future if required. The Council's current view is that any new splash parks, refurbishment of existing paddling pools or a combination of both could be built in a staged development programme over a number of years.

Following the Council's announcement that it intended to redevelop the paddling pool sites into splash parks there was some public opposition to the plans on social media with some residents commenting that they wished to keep the pools as they are. However, there was also some public support for the plans to introduce new splash parks. A petition opposing the plans, which was signed by 1,549 people, was submitted to the Council and considered by Councillors in September 2018.

Following a debate, there was cross-party agreement to review the Council's initial proposal in respect of the existing paddling pools and splash park. As a result, the Council is now carrying out a Scrutiny Committee review to explore options on the existing five paddling pools and one splash park in Harlow. The review is being conducted through a "paddling pool review project team" comprised of members of the Scrutiny Committee and appropriate council officers.

One element of the review is to undertake a comprehensive consultation process with Harlow residents, and in particular local children and young people, to seek their views and opinions; and to help Harlow Council arrive at decisions on a way forward for its paddling pools and splash park.

This report provides the findings from the community consultation exercise, which was undertaken from July to October 2019 by independent consultants *Leisure and the Environment* (LandE) in association with *Playful Planet* - managed by the paddling pool review project team.

1.2 The Paddling Pool Review and Community Consultation

The provision of paddling pool/water play services has links to a number of the Council's priorities i.e:

- Regeneration and a thriving economy
- Wellbeing and Social Inclusion
- Successful Children and Young People

The terms of reference of the paddling pools review are to explore options on the existing five paddling pools and the splash park in Harlow; and the overall purpose and objective of the full review of the paddling pools are:

- To gain an understanding of the operation of the five existing paddling pools and the splash park.
- To gain an understanding of any Health and Safety implications.
- To gain an understanding of costs associated with improvements or the replacement of the five existing paddling pools and one splash park.

- If appropriate, to make recommendations to the Cabinet and the Council for changes and improvements to the existing five paddling pools and the splash park to enhance experience for users of the pools and reduce risk.

The Community Consultation process provides evidence to feed into the wider review process alongside other information being gathered on e.g. health and safety issues; risk/benefit analysis; ongoing maintenance considerations; and costs (capital and revenue).

The findings from the community consultation process will provide information of value to various aspects of the paddling pools review, for example:

- The current use of the five existing paddling pools and the Splash Park; and the extent to which they are valued by local communities.
- The views of local communities on the benefits of water play facilities.
- How far and by what means local people do/would be prepared to travel to access such sites.
- Residents and stakeholder's views on and preferences for the various options for future development of the paddling pool/splash park sites.
- Potential need/aspiration for such provision in areas of Harlow that do not currently have access to water play recreation.

1.3 The brief for the Paddling Pools Consultation

The brief for the Community Consultation project highlighted that the Council wishes to:

- Consult and engage residents to seek their views and opinions to help inform its decisions on a way forward for its paddling pools and splash parks.
- Enhance the pools and not close or reduce the service.
- Seek and secure the views and ideas of residents on what they would like to see in terms of future service provision.
- In particular, ensure meaningful engagement and consultation with Harlow's children and young people.
- Secure views from the wider community including parents, carers, and appropriate community and voluntary organisations.

The brief also made it clear that:

- The Council requires consultants to deliver a wide and effective range of engagement and consultation methods to ensure maximum participation by Harlow residents, in line with a detailed plan to be agreed with the Council.
- Consultants are expected to work closely with the Harlow Youth Council.
- Consultants will need to work in partnership with the Council to promote the consultation and encourage residents' participation.
- Consultants will be responsible for co-ordinating and collating consultation findings; and that they will present their main findings, conclusions and recommendations at the Scrutiny Committee's meeting in October 2019.
- Consultants will report to a "paddling pool review project team" and the Council will nominate a lead officer to facilitate effective communication with consultants.

1.4 The value of play

Harlow's paddling pools and splash park clearly support the Essex Health and Wellbeing Partnership Strategy's aim "for the physical environment and public realm to lend itself to supporting health and wellbeing through good design, access to a range of interesting and stimulating open spaces ... (and) recreational opportunities for all age groups".

Several different scientific disciplines take a keen interest in children's play. Modern studies (Mackett, 2008) of the calorific efficiency of children at play, compared to even rigorous organised sports, confirm that it frequently involves intense levels of physical activity. Unlike sports, however, the activity is spontaneous, expressive of playful instincts, for no reward except enjoyment. Thus, children rest and exert their bodies alternately in a self-regulated, natural rhythm over sustained periods. Writing in the British Medical Journal in 2001 Dietz warned of the coming epidemic of childhood obesity with the observation that the 'main solution' was 'to simply turn off the TV and let them play'.

Recent technological breakthroughs in neuroscience find that playing is an important stimulant of the synaptogenesis (i.e. the formation of new connections between brain cells, or synapses) that is most prolific in early childhood. From this perspective, play literally helps the brain – the whole nervous system, in fact – to construct itself. The motivation and reward centres are especially significant in this process: the sheer enjoyment of playing therefore a key to healthy brain growth. Professor Fraser Brown (2003) describes this 'virtuous cycle' of fulfilling play experiences leading to increased confidence and competence.

Lester and Russell's (2008) extensive trans-disciplinary study of the play literature identifies certain universal processes that bind play, development and well-being together in a relationship that has much bearing on the nature of resilience. These are highlighted below.

The Benefits of Play

- **Emotion regulation:** play enhances the development of flexible and adaptive emotions.
- **Pleasure and enjoyment and the promotion of positive feelings:** play, as an enjoyable experience, promotes positive affect, which in turn encourages further exploration, novelty and creativity
- **Stress response systems:** play offers the opportunity to create and resolve uncertainty, (Spinka et al 2001; Sutton Smith 2003).
- **Creativity:** the key relationship between play and creativity exists in the flexibility of responses to novel and uncertain situations and the non-serious interpretation of a range of stimuli.
- **Learning:** the primary benefits of play are found within the integration of motivation, emotion and reward systems rather than the higher cognitive aspects of brain development (Burghardt 2005).
- **Attachment:** Play has a central role, from the first moments of life through to adulthood, in developing strong attachments.
- **Place attachment:** just as children need strong social attachments, attachment to place may also be seen as a key adaptive system. The creation of a sense of place is vital not only to a sense of well-being but also to maintaining the quality and vitality of the environment.

(From Lester and Russell, 2008)

Playing with the elements is widely regarded by both play theorists and early childhood educationalists as a fundamental affordance of good provision, with water play being especially valued; both for children's enjoyment of outdoor space, and for its range of social and developmental benefits.

2. Project Delivery – Summary of Work Undertaken

2.1 Background and preliminary work

LandE were commissioned on 15th July 2019 with the target for completion of a full report of findings by early October. This was a tight timeframe with the bulk of active consultation needed over the summer. This timing had some limitations as schools were on holiday over this period. However, there were also distinct benefits as the paddling pools were open and there were various children's play programmes running over this time.

Prior to the launch of the consultation programme on 9th August there were a number of tasks that were completed as noted below:

- Initial familiarisation and discussions with Council officers.
- Development of a detailed Consultation Plan¹.
- Visits to the 5 paddling pools and the Potter Street Splash Park – discussion with pool attendants.
- Project Group Meeting - 5th August.
- Initial email communication with Ward Councillors.

2.2 The Consultation Plan.

As required by the brief a detailed Consultation Plan was agreed with the project team along with a breakdown of individual tasks over the project timeframe to ensure that the project was completed on target and within budget.

2.3 Direct consultation and engagement

The project team highlighted the importance of consultants undertaking direct consultation and engagement with children and young people; parents/grandparents/carers; and the wider community. This was achieved through a number of means:

- Harlow Youth Council – children and young people
- Play Day – Town Park - children and carers; and the wider community.
- The School Readiness Programme – children and carers
- Creative/fun consultation workshops - children and young people
- Potter Street Splash Park - children and carers primarily (no council attendants on site).
- The Harvey Centre – all residents
- The Civic Centre – all residents

Hard copy questionnaire surveys were also distributed and collected at the above sessions. In total the consultant team spoke directly with around 270 local residents through the sessions noted above.

2.4 Questionnaire Surveys²

In liaison with the project team a number of questionnaire surveys were developed³:

- Main Residents Survey – primarily online but also by hard copy through the sessions noted above.

¹ The Consultation Plan and associated Gantt Chart is included as Appendix 1

² The surveys used are provided in Appendix 2 and a spreadsheet of the full findings are supplied as Appendix 3.

³ The surveys were open until 20th September 2019.

- Children’s and Residents Surveys – on site - collected by the pool attendants and through the sessions noted in 2.3 above; hard copies were also available at various public outlets across the town.
- Community and Voluntary Organisations Survey – online.
- Schools Survey – parents and carers – online via the Parent Mail system in early September.

2.5 Promotion

- The Council Communications team were active in promoting the consultation generally through the local media, also directing readers to the online survey. They also made good use of the Council’s social media networks.
- The consultant team provided copy and photos to help with promotion.
- Posters were displayed in various public locations around Harlow encouraging people to visit the Council’s website and to complete surveys. Hard copies of the survey were also available at suitable locations.
- The petition organiser and local resident Martin Dear promoted the online survey through local social media; and by updating the people who signed the original petition that the consultation was underway; and providing a link direct to the online survey⁴.

2.6 Face to Face Meetings

In addition, the consultants met directly with a number of local community groups who had expressed an interest in meeting face to face:

- The Town Park User Group
- The petition organiser and colleagues
- PACT for Autism
- Harlow Childminders Group
- Tye Green Community Centre

2.7 Report of Findings and Sub Area Profile

The final task completed was the production of this report which provides a Harlow wide analysis and overview of the findings of the community consultation and engagement process. In addition, we have analysed findings at a more local level and the “sub-area” profile is provided in Appendix 4.

⁴ The Consultants would like to record their personal thanks to Martin Dear for his support in promoting the survey and for meeting with the team.

3. Community Consultation

This section covers community consultation and engagement undertaken with Harlow residents and voluntary and community groups. It is structured into three parts:

- Harlow Residents' Survey
- Play, Youth and Community Groups survey
- Face to Face Meetings

At the end of the section there is a summary and overview of findings

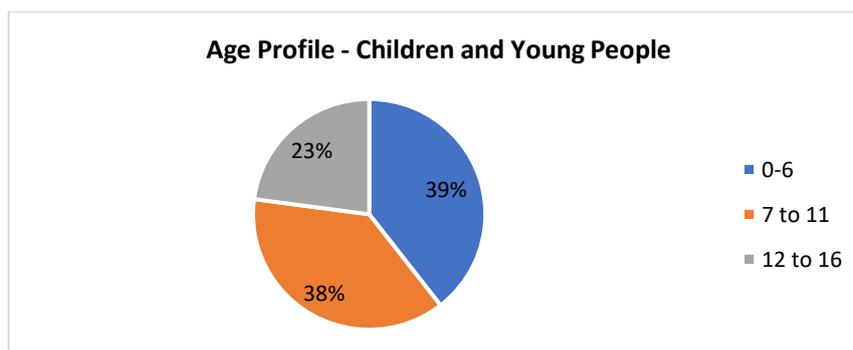
3.1 Harlow Residents' Household Survey

Introduction

A residents' household survey was developed and agreed with the project team as noted in section 2.4 above. There were two versions of the survey based on a shared core set of questions– a hard copy version and a longer online version. The online version enabled us to gather additional detailed information to help with the analysis of local views and issues.

This section provides the combined findings of the surveys as analysis shows that is no significant variance between the findings of the hard copy survey and those of the online survey⁵.

In total 1376 surveys were completed by local residents. It is interesting to note that while as, might be anticipated, 77% of respondents reported they had children and young people in the household 23% did not, indicating a significant level of interest from a wide range of households – not simply those with children at home. Of those who did report having children, the age profile of children in the household is shown below:



This shows interest from families with children of varying ages.

The surveys were promoted by the Council's Communications team as noted above in section 2.4.

⁵ See Appendix 5 for full details of both surveys reported independently

Survey Findings

As well as providing “tick box” options for respondents to provide their views there were also opportunities for them to provide additional comments. The comments in full can be found in Appendix 6 and a small selection appear *in italics at* appropriate points in this section.

Value, Heritage and Benefits

The survey asked “on a scale of 1-10: How important do you think the paddling pools and splash parks are for Harlow’s children, young people, their families and the wider community (1 = Not Important, 10 = Very important).

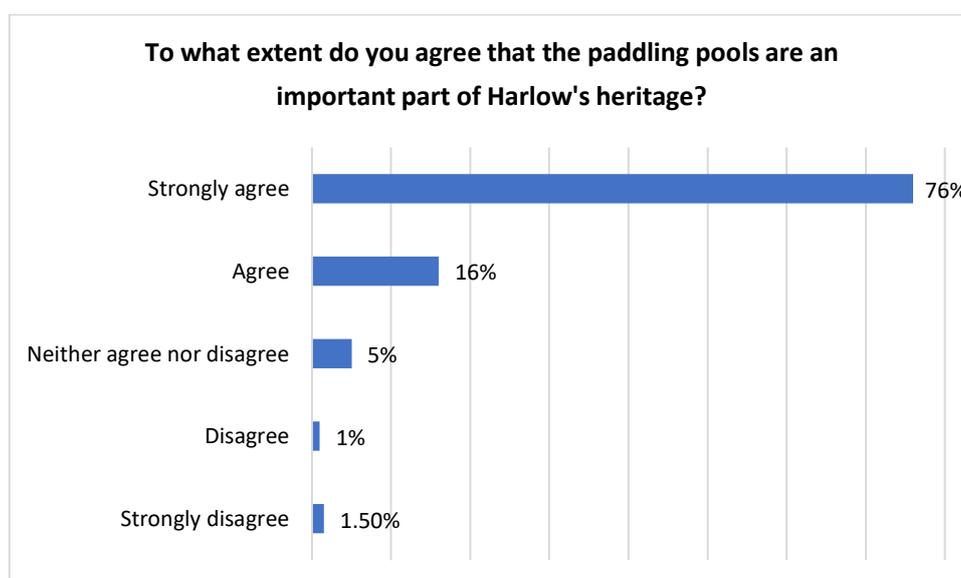
The responses were as follows:

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
7	5	0	4	13	10	33	69	91	1128

The average rating was 9.6 overwhelmingly indicating that respondents believe that the paddling pools and splash park are very important for Harlow’s children, young people, their families and the wider community

“The paddling pools are vital to the people of Harlow, they are used year-round by all sections of the community, even when empty; and when filled are hugely popular. Harlow also has a high level of poverty and not everyone can afford to take their children to the swimming pool at the leisure zone”.

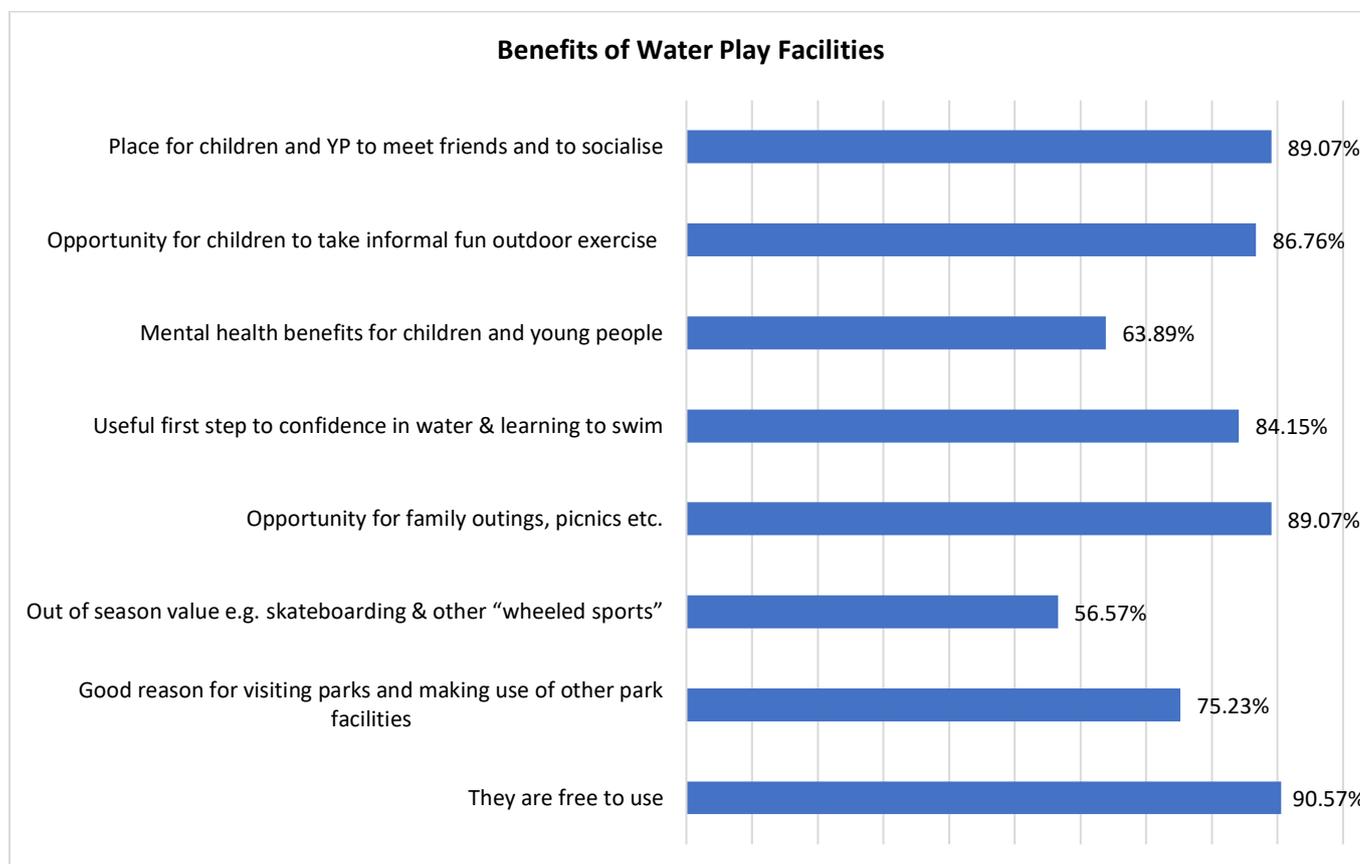
A further question asked “to what extent do you agree that the paddling pools are an important part of Harlow’s heritage?”



76% strongly agree and an additional 16% agree that that the paddling pools are an important part of Harlow’s heritage.

“The paddling pools are a town tradition, the children look forward to going to them each summer, as a town we do not have much for children to do that doesn't cost a small fortune. Many children live in flats with no access to outdoor space and paddling pools are a lovely experience creating lifelong memories”.

The survey then asked “what do you think are the main benefits that the paddling pools and splash parks for local people?”. The responses are summarised in the table below:



A clear majority of respondents highlighted all of the options as being important, most notably:

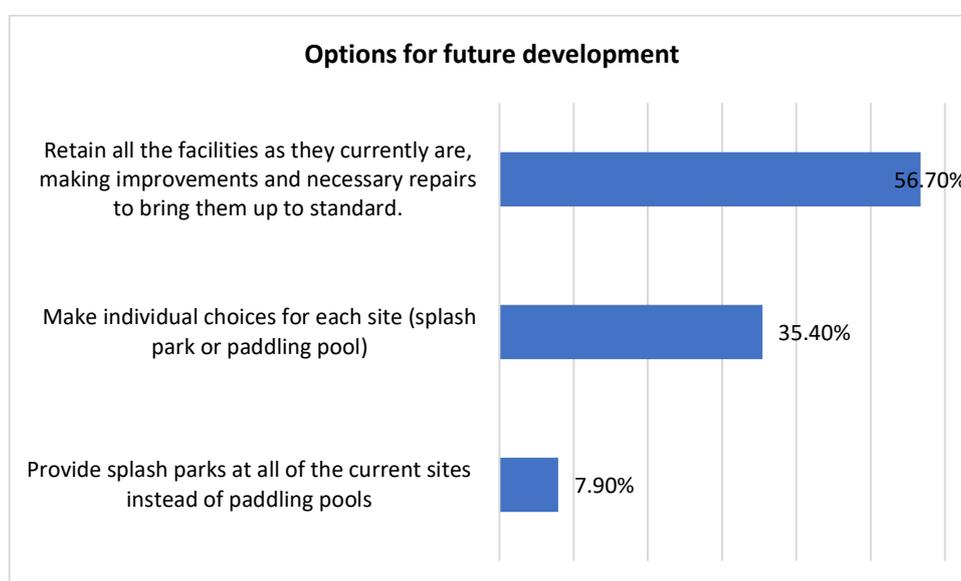
- They are free to use - 90.57%
- They provide a place for children and young people to meet friends and to socialise - 89.07%
- They provide a popular opportunity for family outings, picnics etc. - 89.07%
- They provide an opportunity for children to take informal exercise that is fun, in an outdoor environment - 86.76%

“The pools are also used by skateboarders, children on scooters, bikes, roller skates and other wheeled sports when they are drained, most of the people who use them for this purpose are not yet proficient enough to use the skate park, and as such they serve as an unofficial learning ground. Without the pools serving this purpose, they would only be able to learn in residential areas or the shopping centres”.

Future Development of Paddling Pools/Splash Parks

The project team noted that it was possible that some respondents may not have experience of splash parks or a clear understanding of what they are; or that their only experience of a splash park may be the local one at Potter Street which is quite a small/modest facility compared to what is possible. To mitigate against this issue the survey provided a link to view a larger more typical example of what may be possible while being clear that this should not be taken as an indication of any particular plans for any of the specific sites in Harlow.

The survey asked “in general, which of the following broad options would you prefer the Council to pursue?”



It can be seen that:

- A clear majority (56.7%) supported the view that the Council should “retain all the facilities as they currently are, making improvements and necessary repairs to bring them up to standard”.
- Only 7.9% thought that the Council should “provide splash parks at all of the current sites instead of paddling pools”.
- However, a significant minority (35.4%) thought that the Council should “make individual choices for each site”.

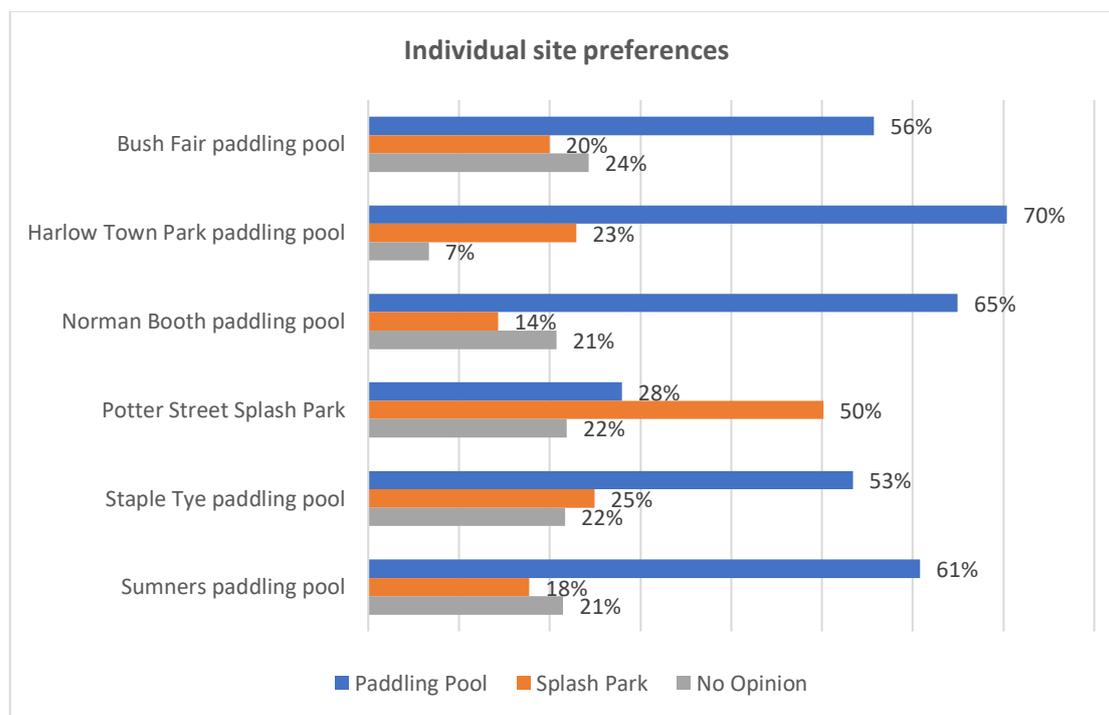
We also provided an opportunity to give suggestions or ideas on other general options or approaches. Many respondents provided views in response to this question with a number indicating that it may be possible to provide a facility which is combination of paddling pool/splash park. Others highlighted that at a “destination” facility such as the Town Park it may be possible to keep the paddling pool and provide an additional splash park facility.

“Build the Splash areas beside the paddling pools, this would save on demolished pools and adds extra facilities to the pools...nobody loses we all gain a splash park and you lot save money! Do not get rid of our pools - do both!”

“I like the idea of some pools being combined with splash parks to make them a bit more interesting. Also, it would be great if the splash parks could open before the summer holidays when it’s hot so that parents can take young pre-school age children without it being full of bigger kids”.

"I think a splash park as well as the paddling pool at the Town Park would be a great resource".

The next question was "for the individual sites please indicate your preferences for future development".



When asked about their view on the development of individual sites, other than for the Potter Street a majority of respondents noted that their preference was for a paddling pool facility, most notably for:

- Harlow Town Park (70%)
- Norman Booth (65%)
- Sumners (61%)

The exception was Potter Street where a 50% reported their preference for a Splash Park compared to 28% for a paddling pool.

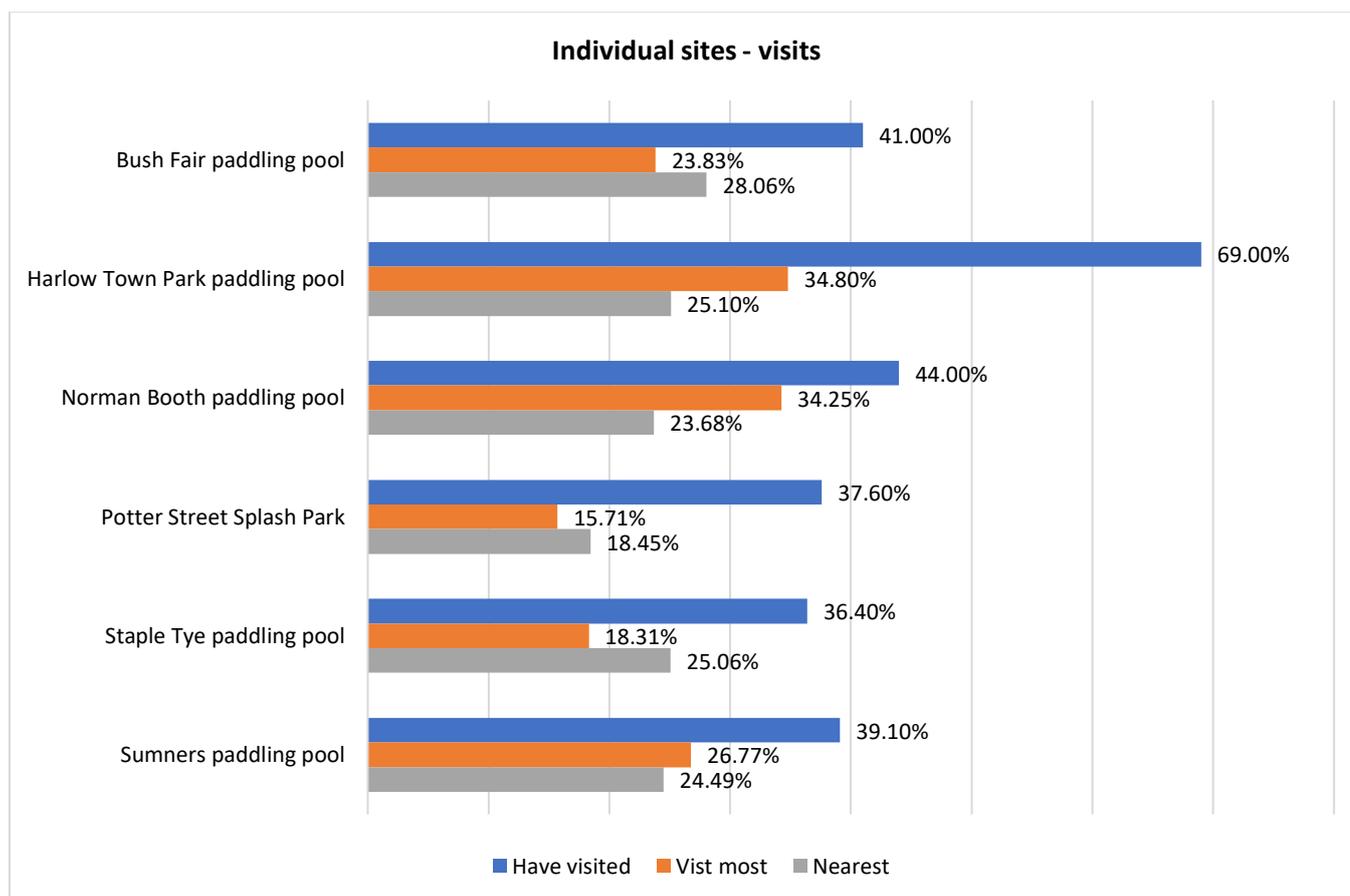
It is also of interest than for most individual sites (other than the Town Park) around 20% said that they had no opinion on how the sites should develop in the future.

Use of, Quality and Access

Residents were asked "do any members of your household visit or make use of any of Harlow's paddling pools/splash park during the summer?"

Over 92% of respondents reported that members of their household visit or make use of at least one of Harlow's water play facilities during the summer.

A supplementary question enquired "if yes, please tell us which one/s you visit (please tick ALL the facilities that you visit); which you visit most frequently; and the one that is nearest to you".



The sites that most respondents have visited are the Town Park (69%), Norman Booth (44%) and Bush Fair (41%).

The sites that the greatest proportion of respondents reported having visited **most** were:

- Harlow Town Park Paddling Pool (34.8%)
- Norman Booth Paddling Pool (34.25%)
- Sumners Paddling Pool (26.77%)

In the main it is not surprising to learn that respondents generally reported that the site they used most was also their nearest but for three facilities this was not the case:

- Bush Fair Paddling Pool
- Staple Tye Paddling Pool
- Potter Street Splash Park

To provide a view on the reasons for this we went on to ask “if the facility that you visit/visited most frequently is not the one closest to where you live please tell us why?”

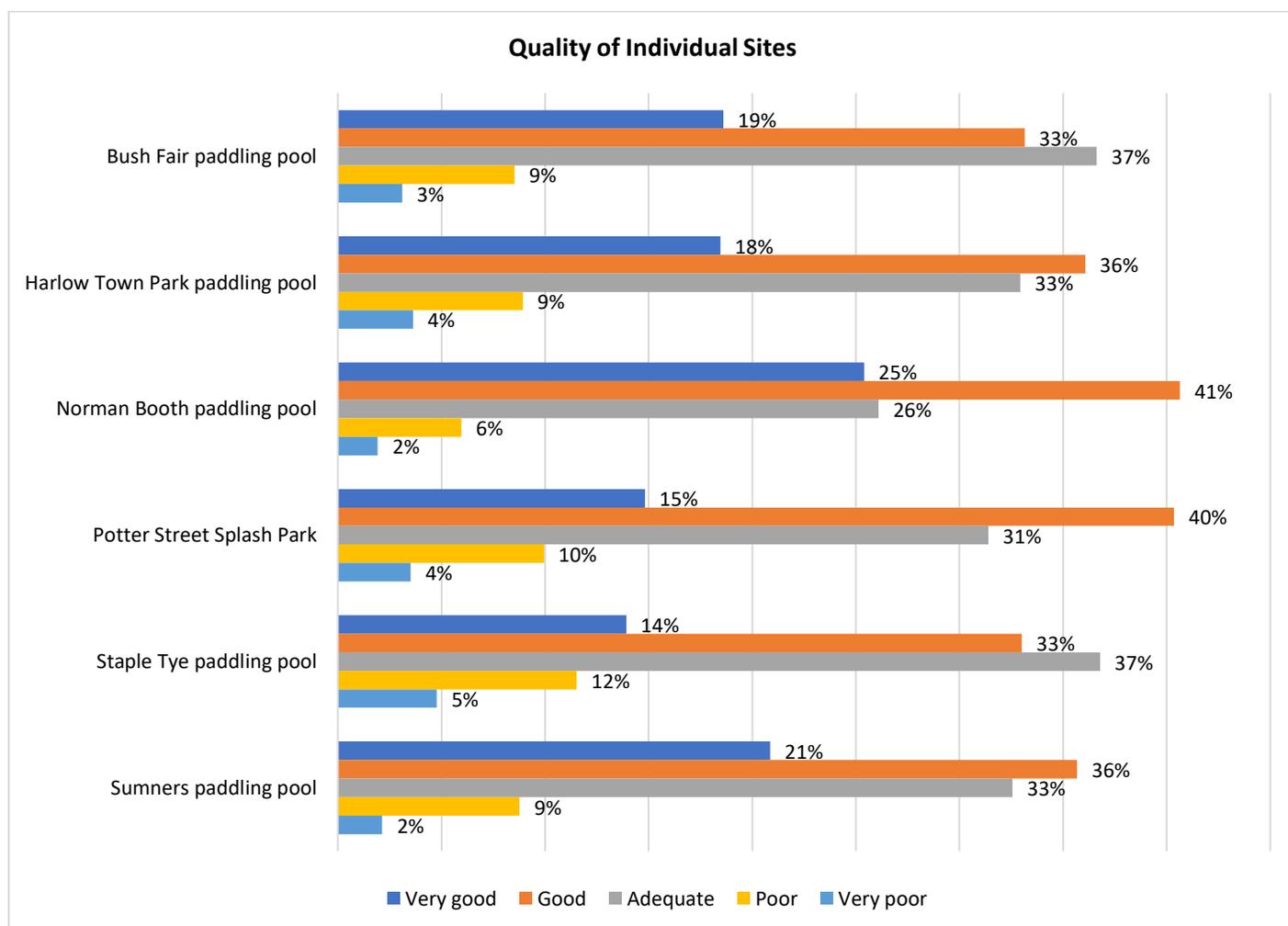
The specific reasons given by those who chose to explain why the site they visited most frequently was not the one closest to where they live can be found in Appendix 6.

“Live near to Bush Fair. We visit Norman booth as the pool and park are enclosed together and trees provide shade. There's no shade at Bush Fair”

I live between Bush Fair and Potter Street. We visit Potter Street most because the park facilities are far better than Bush Fair, and there are shade canopies so we can get a whole day there without anyone getting sunstroke.

Quality

The survey asked residents “in general, how do you rate the quality of the individual facilities”.



Of those expressing an opinion on the quality of individual sites it can be seen that:

Four of the sites were rated quite highly in terms of quality:

- Norman Booth Paddling Pool – 66% rated quality as being good or very good (25% of those saying quality is very good).
- Sumners Paddling Pool - 57% rated quality as being good or very good (21% of those saying quality is very good).
- Potter Street Splash Park - 55% rated quality as being good or very good (15% of those saying quality is very good).
- Harlow Town Park Paddling Pool: 54% rated quality as being good or very good (18% of those saying quality is very good).

The two sites that were rated less well were:

- Staple Tye Paddling Pool – 53% rated quality as being no better than “adequate”
- Bush Fair Paddling Pool - 49% rated quality as being no better than “adequate”

The survey provided respondent with an opportunity to provide comments about the quality of individual sites. The most common points raised related to the need for access to toilet and changing facilities and the general need for repairs, maintenance and improvements - including resurfacing the pools and provision of shade and seating. Many respondents suggested portable toilets could be considered. Full comments on the Quality of sites can be found in Appendix 6.

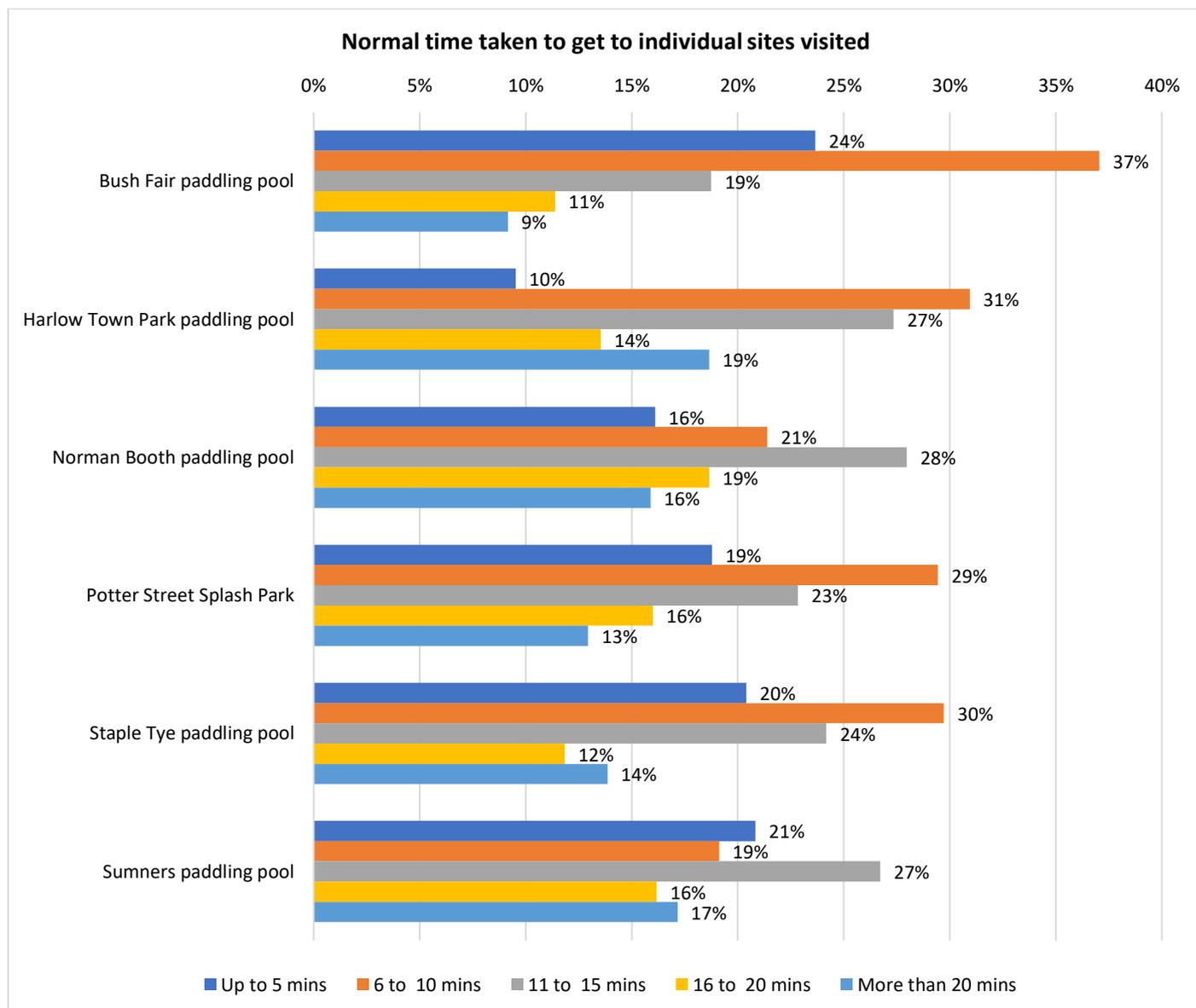
“All the sites need toilets even if they are portable toilets brought in for the summer that are locked at night. It is very difficult to find a toilet at all the sites and if you are alone with 2 kids you have to pack all of your belongings up and leave”

“I think some investment into the aging facilities is what's needed most here. Maybe with the addition of splash park features but do not get rid of the existing paddling pools. It would be nice to see the pools brought up to date and made more appealing for the town to use and enjoy for the future”

“Potter street splash park or any future splash park could be a bit bigger with a few more splashes or little splash pools”

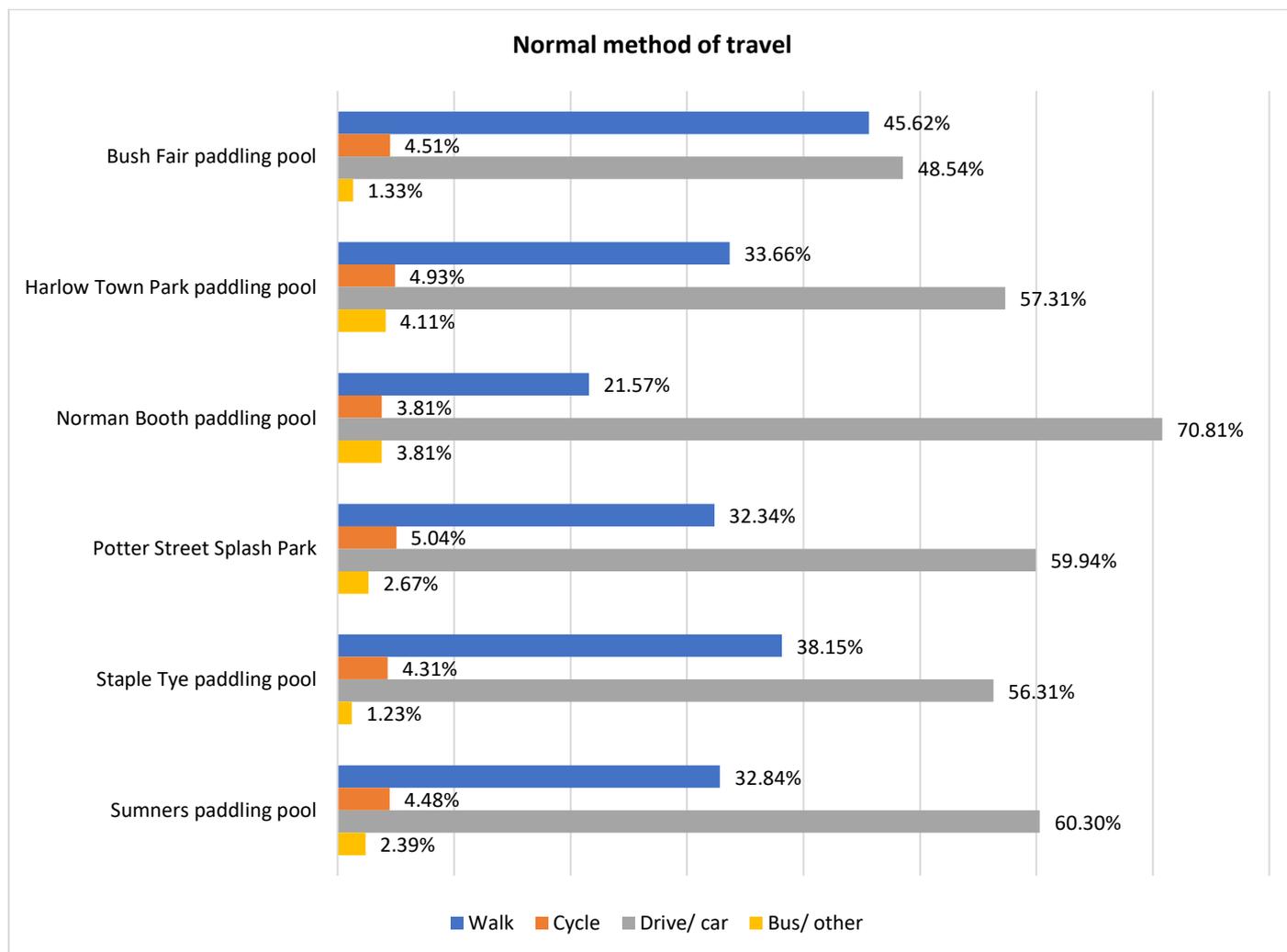
Access

The survey asked “how long do members of your household travel to visit the facilities? Please also tell us whether you would usually walk, cycle, drive or use other forms of transport”.



Some notable points of interest arising from responses are:

- Users of the pools at Bush Fair and Staple Tye tend to be local to these pools – travelling 10 minutes or less to make use of the facilities. This is particularly clear for Bush Fair where 61% of users access the pool in 10 minutes or less (of these 24% travel less than 5 minutes).
- By contrast many users travel significantly further to make use of the pools at Norman Booth, Town Park and Sumners. For example, 35% travel 16 minutes or more to visit Norman Booth Paddling Pool; and 19% report that they travel more than 20 minutes to use the Town Park pool.
- Travel times to visit Potter Street splash park are more varied – 48% travel up to 10 minutes but 26% report travelling more than 15 minutes



Some points of interest as regards method of travel are:

- With the exception of Bush Fair, the majority of users report driving to visit the water play facilities. Our experience is that the most common method of accessing local play facilities is by foot/cycle and this tends to suggest that in general the parks with pools are “destination” facilities for family visits as well as play facilities visited independently by children and young people.
- Just over half of the visits to Bush Fair paddling pool are made on foot/by cycle and around 42.5% travel similarly to use the Staple Tye pool.

The survey went on to ask “is the distance and time needed to get to your nearest paddling pool/splash park a barrier to you making visits?”.

Just over 87% of respondents reported that distance and time is not a barrier to making visits but 13% reported that it is.

A supplementary question enquired “if it is a barrier do you think there is a need for a paddling pool/splash park nearer to where you live?”

Of the 13% who said it was a barrier 74% of these nevertheless reported that this did not mean there is a need for a paddling pool/splash park nearer to where they lived.

The most common areas where residents suggested there may be a need for a more local water play facility were the Church Langley and Newhall areas.

The survey also invited those who indicated a need for additional pools to provide additional information. Full details are included in Appendix 6.

“Church Langley and Newhall are huge estates in Harlow and are unusual for the lack of paddling pools. Given the amount of kids these areas could really benefit from one”

The survey ended by thanking those who had completed the questionnaire and explained that “your responses will help the Council to plan effectively to improve paddling pool/splash park provision across Harlow in line with what local people think is most needed”.

3.2 Play, Youth and Community Groups survey

Introduction

An online survey for local community organisations was developed and agreed with the project team. The survey was based on the residents' questionnaire but provided greater opportunity for more qualitative input. Council officers supplied contact details for various local organisations likely to have an interest in Harlow's paddling pools and LandE supplemented these via web searches of local organisations e.g. through the County Council online directory of local organisations.

Responses were received from the following ten local organisations who also explained their role as noted below:

Group	Role and use of paddling pools
Church Langley Childminders	We are a group of 18 childminders who meet regularly. We cater for all children ageing from 3months to 16 years. Our members use all of the paddling pools as the childminders live in various areas in Harlow. I would say at least 5 (maybe more) childminders use the paddling pools weekly. We can have up to 12 children per childminder at times. Normally they are used for splash/water fights/ballgames/play/picnic.
Harlow Childminders	Childcare providers. We use Staple Tye Paddling pool and park for whole days during the school holidays. Town Park Paddling pool and Park throughout the holidays, Pets corner, adventure playground, and newly built playground behind Pets Corner
Home from Home Childcarers	Nursery and holiday club for children aged 1-11 years. We are regular visitors to the Norman Booth park with paddling pool.
Kingsmoor Academy	Primary School & Nursery
PACT for Autism	Support local families affected by Autism and similar conditions and disabilities
St Mary's Church Little Parndon	Church - we encompass cradle to grave! Individuals especially those caring for children and grandchildren love the paddling pools. The town park is our nearest. Some people say that they were disappointed that the pools closed while we still had lovely weather. I understand that perhaps limited resources mean that you can only open in the school holidays but it would be nice if they could open any weekend in good weather...
Sunflower Day Nursery	We are a day nursery who have children aged between 9 months and 5 years. We make regular use of the paddling pool situated in Sumners.
Tye Green Community Centre	Community Centre for all groups who wish to hire our rooms, including a pre-school every day
Upwards with Downs	A local Downs Syndrome charity that support children and adults with the condition. This can be through regular activities and events. We also provide speech and signing to name a few.
Youth Concern Trust	Young people's charity providing emotional well-being and mental health support

Value and Heritage

- All of the local groups rated the paddling pools and splash parks as being "very important" for Harlow's children, young people, their families and the wider community.
- All of the groups "strongly agree" that the paddling pools are an important part of Harlow's heritage.

Some of the group representatives explained their views further on these aspects as noted below:

Group	Comments
Church Langley Childminders	As long as I've lived in Harlow I have been taking my children to the paddling pools. After moving from London I believe this is a great addition to children's summers, creating memories.
Harlow Childminders	The pools have been in use for the 45 years before I came here and have always been the centrepiece to each park.
PACT for Autism	Harlow has always been a great town for families. Personally, I have made use of the pools with my children, nieces and nephews as well as a child myself growing up in Harlow.
St Mary's Church, Little Parndon	They are part of the inherent community and family ethos which was integral to the design of Harlow.
Sunflower Day Nursery	The benefits are brilliant, for young and older children. It's just a shame they are only open for the six weeks holiday
Tye Green Community Centre	Harlow is a young town with lots of children. Many children are from one parent homes. This facility gives all parents the opportunity to take their children somewhere for no cost - these opportunities are very few and far between.
Upwards with Downs	They are nice areas for all the family to enjoy together.
Young Concern Trust	As a born and raised in Harlow resident I have many happy memories of using the paddling pool facilities as a child and again with my own son and I feel that it would be a huge loss to families if all of the paddling pools were replaced by splash pools

Quality

The groups were asked to provide their views on the quality of any of the paddling pools/splash park that they used. In the main the groups tend to be fairly happy with current quality of the different facilities. It is notable that:

- Norman Booth paddling pool is particularly highly rated – four out of the six groups who use it rate the quality as being very good and another as good.
- Harlow Town park Paddling Pool is also rated very highly – six of the eight groups who use this facility rate it as very good or good.
- Sumners paddling pool is the least well rated – three of the six groups who use it say it is at best adequate with one of the three rating it as poor.
- None of the groups rated any of the facilities as very poor.

Specific comments on quality are noted below

- As the Paddling pools are used mainly for children and young people you would be preferable if toilet facilities were available. As we spend an entire day at these pools with picnic lunches, we have to bring a 'Potty' with us for all children to use (up to 12) as no pool has these facilities and the local surrounding buildings do not allow use e.g. GPCA, Norman Booth Centre, Sunflower Children Centre etc.,
- The existing pools really do need cleaning.
- Personally, I prefer pools rather than splash parks as my son with Autism hates fine touch causes by a splash.

- We would like to have an Autism/Special needs afternoon session available for families (they do this in Bishops Stortford).
- Need to ensure there are adequate changing and toilet facilities for people with disabilities.

Future Development

The groups were asked about the general approach they would like the Council to adopt as regards future development of the water play facilities.

- Six out of the ten groups would like the Council to make individual choices for each site (splash park, paddling pool or a combination).
- Two groups would like the council to provide splash parks at all of the current sites (instead of paddling pools).
- Two groups would like the council to retain all the facilities as they currently are, making improvements and necessary repairs to bring them up to standard.

Additional specific comments relating to future development were:

- Fantastic that the pools are open in the summer school holidays but would like to see them open a little bit longer either side. Maybe create some early years learning/school readiness at the pools. Incorporating maths, sharing, pe games, understanding the world etc. Toilets can also be an issue, or lack of them.
- I feel families would pay a small charge £1 per child which might help the upkeep if these parks and pools.
- Make choices for individual areas, following meetings with the local communities to seek their views.
- All the Paddling Pools require renovating and facilities added.
- If possible, it would be nice if there was a presence of authority at them when they are open to stop the anti-social behaviour that takes place on occasions.

Site Specific Comments

Facility	Comments
Bush Fair	Needs upgrading. Bush Fair pool is quite vulnerable, and needs better security, as it is in an open field, and does get vandalised. There are no toilet facilities in the area, and people try to come into local buildings to change their children and to use the toilets. These should be an automatic requirement in any council run facility.
Harlow Town Park	Needs upgrading and better access to toilets
Norman Booth	Not enough shaded areas. Needs upgrading. This was always my favourite.
Staple Tye	Needs upgrading This was the local pool used by me as I grew up. When I last visited Summer 2018 it was in a poor condition with broken seats. Steps make this not wheelchair friendly.
Sumners	Needs upgrading

3.3 Face to Face Meetings

As noted in Section 2.6 a number of meetings were held with local community groups who had expressed an interest in meeting face to face i.e.

- The Town Park User Group
- PACT for Autism
- Tye Green Community Centre
- Harlow Childminders Group
- The petition organiser and colleagues

This section summaries views expressed through these discussions.

The Town Park User Group

The Town Park User Group (TPUG) is comprised of individuals and representatives from local organisations who have an interest in the Park and how it is managed and developed; and who wish to contribute positively to its future improvement. The group meets every quarter.

Some of the key points from the discussions are noted below:

- There was a clear consensus in the group that the paddling pool is key feature of the park, highly valued by the whole town but that it needs improvements; most particularly the addition of toilets and changing facilities much closer to the pool.
- There was, however, also a view that, as the town's main park, it should offer the best and most varied and inclusive amenities, and there was agreement with an idea put forward by a couple of members that perhaps the town park should offer both a paddling pool and a splash park. A space to the side of the pool was suggested as a potential site for an adjacent splash park with access points between them.
- One member of the group suggested that, with many residents not being familiar with Potter Street, introducing a splash park into the Town Park before proceeding with changes to other sites, would familiarise the community with what type of facility splash park is and enable a more informed view to be developed as to their desirability or otherwise at the other sites.
- Other discussion focussed on health and safety and cost issues (a concern expressed was that the council may want to save money by reducing staff and other costs, as the splash parks need no supervision).
- The inclusive nature of the paddling pool as a social hub which is used by families and children up to year 8 was highlighted; and it was queried whether splash parks are primarily a version of a young children's playground, not meant for older children and young people, who may therefore feel excluded.
- One suggestion, which also had support from the whole group, was for more, and more social (circular and semi-circular designed) benches and picnic tables to be introduced, and also a youth shelter.

Overall, there was a unanimous view that the Town Park paddling pool should remain, but with improved facilities, including, perhaps, an adjoining splash park – but that toilets are the priority (they have of course raised this on previous occasions).

PACT for Autism (Parents and Children Together)

PACT is a local organisation that supports families affected by autism and similar conditions and disabilities. They are based in Latton Bush and cover Harlow and the surrounding areas. Some of the key points from the discussions are noted below:

- Because of their autistic condition most children and young people take particular pleasure in sensory experiences. Therefore, moving water is attractive to them. However, like anybody else they have likes and dislikes. Some will prefer a body of water as offered in a pool, as they don't like the tickling effect of splash park fountains. Others may prefer the opposite. So, there needs to be variety in provision across the Town.
- Toilets are essential at these places irrespective of whether they are pools, splashpads, or perhaps some other hybrid.
- Some form of privacy is important for changing. Many on the autistic spectrum are not socially aware. An adolescent child on the spectrum may still derive great enjoyment from using a paddling pool or splashpad; but, may also have no personal issue with taking their clothes on and off in public to change. This can be an issue to other users, of course.
- Even if children/young people on the autistic spectrum don't want to use pools/splashpads directly, they can often take great pleasure in just watching activity, so this is an important dimension to consider.
- The ability to park a car reasonably close is important for many parents and carers of those on the autistic spectrum. However, having said that, many with the condition like to walk.
- Vandalism and broken glass etc are issues at some of the existing park locations. It is important that venues are staffed- whether this be by council staff, or trained volunteers.
- Some sensitively programmed autism friendly sessions at existing or new venues would be appreciated. PACT have a training office who could advise staff in this respect. Autism-friendly sessions are run at a venue in Bishops Stortford.
- Those on the spectrum can have other disabilities, and there would in any event be a need to provide for wheelchair access.

The key message from PACT was that there is no uniform solution, and provision should be varied to take account of local circumstances and needs, and to offer variety across Harlow.

Tye Green Community Centre

Tye Green Community Centre is based at Bush Fair Harlow and the centre cater for all groups who wish to hire our rooms including a pre-school that meets every day every day. Some of the key points from the discussions are noted below:

- It was noted that the centre hosted many groups and organisations that have an interest in the issues under discussion.
- Toilets are essential, and a kiosk (perhaps a concession) would be desirable. Next to the community centre, there is a separate block which is derelict and could be renovated for use as a pavilion (it was noted that this is owned by the County Council, as is the community centre itself)⁶.

⁶ After the meeting staff showed the consultants the building referred to above. It is a two-storey structure which might be described as link-detached from the community building. It probably is not beyond repair/overhaul, but at an estimate it is about 200 metres away from the paddling pool.

- Given anti-social behaviour issues in the locality security is paramount. Facilities need to be fenced, and cleanliness maintained.
- The issues with the paddling pool locally, cannot be detached from wider issues of social and economic decline. The fact that the paddling pool may need to be closed/replaced is just symptomatic of the decline in public/local authority investment over the years. Facilities are being run-down, and paddling pools in the parks are one of few attractions that can still be used and which are free - a very important consideration, especially for families living in deprived circumstances.
- It was felt that new facilities could not be considered in isolation from the holistic treatment of the park. A well-used, designed, and secure park can help to combat anti-social behaviour.
- The park (and the paddling pool) need to be maintained and improved as a social focus. The decline in the traditional town centre means that local parks must be protected and improved as a place where residents feel part of a community.
- The management and staff felt that it was important to have further local input into any specific proposals involving the future of Bush Fair paddling pool - be it upgrade, or a new facility.

Harlow Childminders Group

The Harlow Childminders Group are a group of local childcare providers with members across all of Harlow. Some key points from the discussions are noted below:

- It was suggested that paddling pools are generally better for children than splash parks, as they are a stepping stone to swimming, by making young children water-aware.
- Paddling pools are also better than splash parks for helping to develop social and motor skills. Children tend to help each other when they see a younger child who might be in trouble in the water. This was considered to be a very important aspect that should not be ignored.
- Within the summer months they are one of the few free attractions. Swimming pools in general are expensive to use.
- The childminder members tend to make most use out of Norman Booth, Staple Tye, and Town Park.
- Toilets are essential. With the age group that the carers deal with, young children can accidentally soil themselves.
- Shade is also very important and is lacking in general. Although the group does have its own gazebo, which it erects when at pools.
- The perception is that the pools are used by the 0-14 age group. There can occasionally be problems caused by the youths bullying younger children, but this is not felt to be a serious issue. Parents and minders can often deal with it by having some sharp words with the miscreants.
- The pools are considered to be an all-year round resource, and are used for skating etc when empty.
- It is important to think through disability access issues as part of the process when planning for future development of water play facilities.

The Petition Organiser and Campaigners

As noted in section one, a petition opposing the Council's original plan to redevelop the paddling pool sites in to splash parks was submitted to the Council and considered by Councillors in September 2018. In discussion with the petition organiser and local campaigners a number of points were noted:

- The main reason the campaign was started was in reaction to the Council's approach in announcing their intention to redevelop the paddling pool sites as splash parks without proper public consultation.
- The campaign organisers have lived a long time in Harlow and noted that generations of Harlow families had used the paddling pools and they were still as popular and valuable as ever with local people.
- The original concern was primarily about the Town Park pool but this had widened to include all of the water play facilities across the town.
- The paddling pool sites had all year-round use as the empty pools were used for play, particularly for skateboarding, roller skating, BMX etc.
- The pools provide an early introduction to water for young children and help with confidence in water and an introduction to swimming.
- The petition organiser, Martin Dear, had subsequently attended a number of Scrutiny Committee meetings.
- The campaigners were pleased that the Council was now undertaking a consultation and engagement programme and hoped that the Council would be guided by the findings.
- The campaigners agreed to help the process by promoting the online residents survey through their petition page on Change.org as well as through local Facebook groups.

3.4 Ward Councillors

Ward Council members were contacted at the beginning of the project and invited to provide any initial thoughts they had on the paddling pool review. A selection of comments received are noted below:

Value, Heritage and Benefits

- The paddling pools provide an opportunity for play with family and friends outdoors and for exercise. A chance for non-swimmers to get used to water and help build their confidence. The surrounding green space can be a place for further play and picnics and altogether a fun day out.
- It engages both adults and children - bringing the community together
- The water play facilities provide fun and family enjoyment; and children learning of the fun playing safely with water
- In Harlow, they are part of growing up, a rite of passage, for generations of Harlow children where the different generations can share their memories of fun and being together. They are an icon of Harlow as much as the Family Group.
- Visits to the pools provide memories of past playing times
- Paddling pools are historically a wonderful place to have fun safely

Quantity

- There are no water play facilities in Church Langley although there are a variety of open spaces for other play and recreation although I am sure one would be welcome in the right location as plenty of residents of Church Langley have moved within the town.
- There isn't a water play facility in Mark Hall ward - there used to be a paddling pool near Blackbush Spring
- I strongly believe we need to keep the current number of water play areas especially the Paddling Pools. We have in Old Harlow a well-used Paddling Pool which parents and children love also residents come from other areas that do not have a Paddling Pool.
- Norman Booth is centrally located for Newhall and Gilden Park but given the forecast population growth the developers should be encouraged to provide another pool.

Quality

- They are functional, you can run around safely with bare feet with non-slip surfaces. They are fenced to keep out dogs but not all the gates operate satisfactorily with long delays for repairs.
- Potter Street is quite new. The other sites need some TLC. There is also a need for changing facilities.
- The facilities in Old Harlow are good and is situated in a lovely safe site with other play equipment. Toilet facilities were a problem but the Norman Booth Centre (BAATS) allows use of their facilities

Access

- It would be 'nice' to have more but given the expense more would be difficult to justify. Having to travel a little distance makes a visit a bit more special. The sites are accessible but children with

disabilities may find the noise and movement of any playground daunting, but with support they should cope and be able to enjoy themselves.

- There are no disability changing facilities or toilets
- Facilities are generally good.

General Approach

- Splash parks are more entertaining than fitness which must be encouraged but they do not create the same atmosphere as pools and do not create the same memories of action and fun.
- Having a better understanding of maintenance issues and costs involved is important.
- I strongly believe that the existing Paddling Pools are the best option and to spend money prudently on improving them.
- Future development should be shaped by the consultation.
- I think it is important that the consultation takes priority.

Other Comments

- Having spoken with numerous residents I think that their preference and of their children is that a Paddling Pool provides more adventurous play.
- We have taken grandchildren to Sumners paddling pool. They love it there. They have also tried splash parks elsewhere but say they prefer paddling pools.
- My granddaughter's friend who is 11 told me she was quite frightened of water when she first went to the paddling pool at Staple Tye but she watched other children in the water and gave it a try. She said she was worried about getting on her face and in her mouth but once she had done both she realised she was in control and the fear went. She swims like a fish now.
- I was very impressed with the consultation of both adults and children in the town park recently (Play Day).
- I have not seen a splash park - a difficulty in evaluating children's responses too.
- The paddling pool in the town park is extremely popular, and ideally situated, with the hill overlooking. I would be very reluctant to see a change here. That seemed to be the view of children and their parents responding to the consultation at town park while I was there.

3.5 Summary of findings – Community Consultation

Residents Household Survey

Value, Heritage and Benefits

- A very large majority of respondents think that the paddling pools and splash park are very important for Harlow's children, young people, their families and the wider community. On a scale of 1 to 10 (ten being very important) the average score was 9.6.
- 76% strongly agree and an additional 16% agree that that the paddling pools are an important part of Harlow's heritage.
- A particularly large proportion of respondents (over 85%) noted the main benefits of Harlow's water play facilities as being: they are free to use; they provide a place for children and young people to meet friends and to socialise; they provide a popular opportunity for family outings, picnics etc; they provide an opportunity for children to take informal exercise that is fun, in an outdoor environment.

Future Development of Paddling Pools/Splash Parks

- A majority (56.5%) supported the view that the Council should "retain all the facilities as they currently are, making improvements and necessary repairs to bring them up to standard".
- Only 8% thought that the Council should "provide splash parks at all of the current sites instead of paddling pools".
- However, a significant minority (35.5%) thought that the Council should "make individual choices for each site".
- When asked about their view on the development of individual sites, other than for the Potter Street a majority of respondents noted that their preference was for a paddling pool facility, most notably for: Harlow Town Park (70%); Norman Booth (65%); Sumners (61%)
- The exception was Potter Street where a 50% reported their preference for a Splash Park compared to 28% for a paddling pool.

Use and Quality

- Over 92% of respondents reported that members of their household visit or make use of at least one of Harlow's water play facilities during the summer.
- The sites that the greatest proportion of respondents reported having visited most were: Harlow Town Park Paddling Pool (34.8%); Norman Booth Paddling Pool (34.3%); and Sumners Paddling Pool (26.8%)
- Respondents generally reported that the site they used most was also their nearest but for three facilities this was not the case: Bush Fair Paddling Pool; Staple Tye Paddling Pool; and Potter Street Splash Park.
- Four of the sites were rated highly in terms of quality: Norman Booth Paddling Pool; Sumners Paddling Pool; Potter Street Splash Park; and Harlow Town Park Paddling Pool.
- The two sites that were rated less well were: Staple Tye Paddling Pool and Bush Fair Paddling Pool.

Access

- Users of the pools at Bush Fair and Staple Tye tend to be local to these pools – travelling 10 minutes or less to make use of the facilities.
- By contrast many users travel significantly further to make use of the pools at Norman Booth, Town Park and Sumners.
- With the exception of Bush Fair, the majority of users report driving to visit the water play facilities. Our experience is that the most common method of accessing local play facilities is by foot/cycle

and this tends to suggest that in general the parks with pools are “destination” facilities for family visits as well as play facilities visited independently by children and young people.

- Just over half of the visits to Bush Fair paddling pool are made on foot/by cycle and around 42.5% travel similarly to use the Staple Tye pool.
- Just over 87% of respondents reported that distance and time is not a barrier to making visits but 13% reported that it is.
- The most common areas where residents suggested there is a need for a more local water play facility were the Church Langley and Newhall areas.

Community Organisations Survey

Value, Heritage and Quality

- All of the local groups rated the paddling pools and splash parks as being “very important” for Harlow’s children, young people, their families and the wider community.
- All of the groups “strongly agree” that the paddling pools are an important part of Harlow’s heritage.
- Norman Booth and the Town Park paddling pools are particularly highly rated in terms of quality.

Future Development

- A majority of the local groups would like the Council to make individual choices for each site (splash park, paddling pool or a combination).
- As suggestion was to make choices for individual areas, following further consultation with the local communities to seek their views.
- All the paddling pools require renovating and facilities added such as toilets.
- Need to ensure there are adequate changing and toilet facilities for people with disabilities.
- It would be useful to have an special needs afternoon session available for families (they do this in Bishops Stortford).

Face to Face Meetings

In the main the meetings reinforced the views already expressed in earlier sections – some additional points of note were:

- Overall, the Town Park Users Group (TPUG) view was that the Town Park paddling pool should remain, but with improved facilities, including, perhaps, an additional adjoining splash park – but that toilets nearby are the priority.
- TPUG also noted that with many residents not being familiar with Potter Street, introducing a splash park into the Town Park before proceeding with changes to other sites, could familiarise the community with what type of facility a splash park is and enable a more informed view to be developed as to their desirability or otherwise at the other sites.
- The key message from PACT (Parents and Children Together) for Autism was that there is no uniform solution, and provision should be varied to take account of local circumstances and needs, and to offer variety across Harlow. They also emphasised the need for toilets, changing rooms and nearby parking.
- Tye Green Community Centre staff noted that toilets are essential, and a kiosk (perhaps a concession) would be desirable. They also suggested that it was important to have further local input into any specific proposals involving the future of Bush Fair paddling pool - be it upgrade, or a new facility.
- Harlow Childminders noted that shade is also very important and is lacking in general.

- The Petition Organiser group emphasised that the paddling pool sites had all year round use as the empty pools were used for play, particularly for skateboarding, roller skating, BMX etc; and that the pools provide an early introduction to water for young children and help with confidence in water and an introduction to swimming. They expressed hope that the Council would be guided by the findings of the consultation.

Ward Councillor Comments

- All of the ward councillors who responded to provide initial thoughts on the paddling pools expressed the view that the water play facilities were of great community value and were part of Harlow's heritage; and that it was important for them to be retained and improved.
- Church Langley was mentioned as an area where an additional water play facility would be welcome (in the right location).
- It was further mentioned that Norman Booth is centrally located for Newhall and Gilden Park but given the forecast population growth the developers should be encouraged to provide another pool.
- One councillor noted that it would be 'nice' to have more water play facilities but given the expense more may be difficult to justify; and another highlighted that having a better understanding of maintenance issues and costs involved is important.
- A number of council members emphasised that future development should be shaped by the community consultation.

4. Children and Young People consultation

4.1 Direct consultation and engagement with children and young people

Introduction

Jean Atkin works as a freelance poet in education and community projects, so Leisure and the Environment asked her to work on this consultation in order to provide it with a creative and qualitative element, in particular to work with children and young people. She planned a range of activities that could be used in different environments:

- making collaborative poems by collecting comments and conversation, then editing material 'on the spot' to make a giant collaborative poem for the group, which they could keep, or perform.
- making tiny books about the paddling pool experience, which were photographed, and the children could keep
- Jean also wrote a short rhyming poem with actions - The Paddling Pool Poem - which she used with groups, to encourage the sharing of memories of play in the paddling pools
- A children's 'smiley face' survey form was developed, for use particularly on Play Day, and at the paddling pools

Identifying the groups

The following groups and opportunities were identified through Council contacts:

- Harlow Youth Council
- The Edua Sey Cultural Academy
- Play Day in Harlow Town Park
- Sam's Place, Harlow Fields School and College
- The School Readiness Programme, Parndon Wood Nature Reserve
- The School Readiness Programme, Harlow Museum Garden

Record of activity

Harlow Youth Council – 5th August

Harlow Youth Council is a locally elected group of 13 – 19 year olds who live in or attend school in Harlow. As a group, the Youth Council represents the views and opinions of young people in the town. The Youth Council provides an opportunity for all young people to have their say, through their Youth Councillor, about issues that affect them.

The consultants met the Youth Council in the Council Chamber with the Youth Council support officer. While one consultant led a discussion round the table, notes of what was said were taken, as close to verbatim as possible. The group of young people were thoughtful and mature in their views and considerations.

The notes were then edited to create a poem on a long piece of wallpaper that captured the young people's voices (see image). The poem was presented to them, and read aloud. The Youth Council asked that its poem be included in the project report.

The young people also completed the short adult survey.

Youth Council Poem

I remember sitting
in Town Park paddling pool one day
in summer when I was little
and someone
had a water gun and got me
I remember that

my whole family, we'd go
to Staple Tye paddling pool
since we live near
we've been going to the paddling pools
since I was young, on hot days
and in winter, for skateboarding
people like paddling pools, they're
a destination

a lot of us
have good memories
and now, we don't paddle
any more, we'd just splash
each other, but it's chillin'
just sitting there, socialising

but splash parks are different
in a splash park, it's fun, the water
travels in more directions, but
the paddling pool is more social
and when there's no water the kids
and the teenagers use them
I think that's a good thing

I would say not
a good thing, to turn paddling pools into splash parks
but not everyone knows what to expect
from a splash park
more mysterious
splash parks,
but people might like
to try something new



actually I think
I prefer splash parks, I've never
known what was at the bottom
of a paddling pool

or you could have
a bit of both
you could have a paddling pool
and holes under the surface
so water comes up through
that might
be fun

Efua Sey Cultural Academy – 6th August

The Efua Sey Cultural Academy provides cultural arts workshops in Harlow schools, libraries, play/youth/community centres and various venues, and after-school / holiday play clubs for children and young people of all abilities and disabilities.

The consultants met the children in the Unity Church at Black Springs. There were 11 children aged between about 7 and about 12. They proved to be a lovely, enthusiastic group.

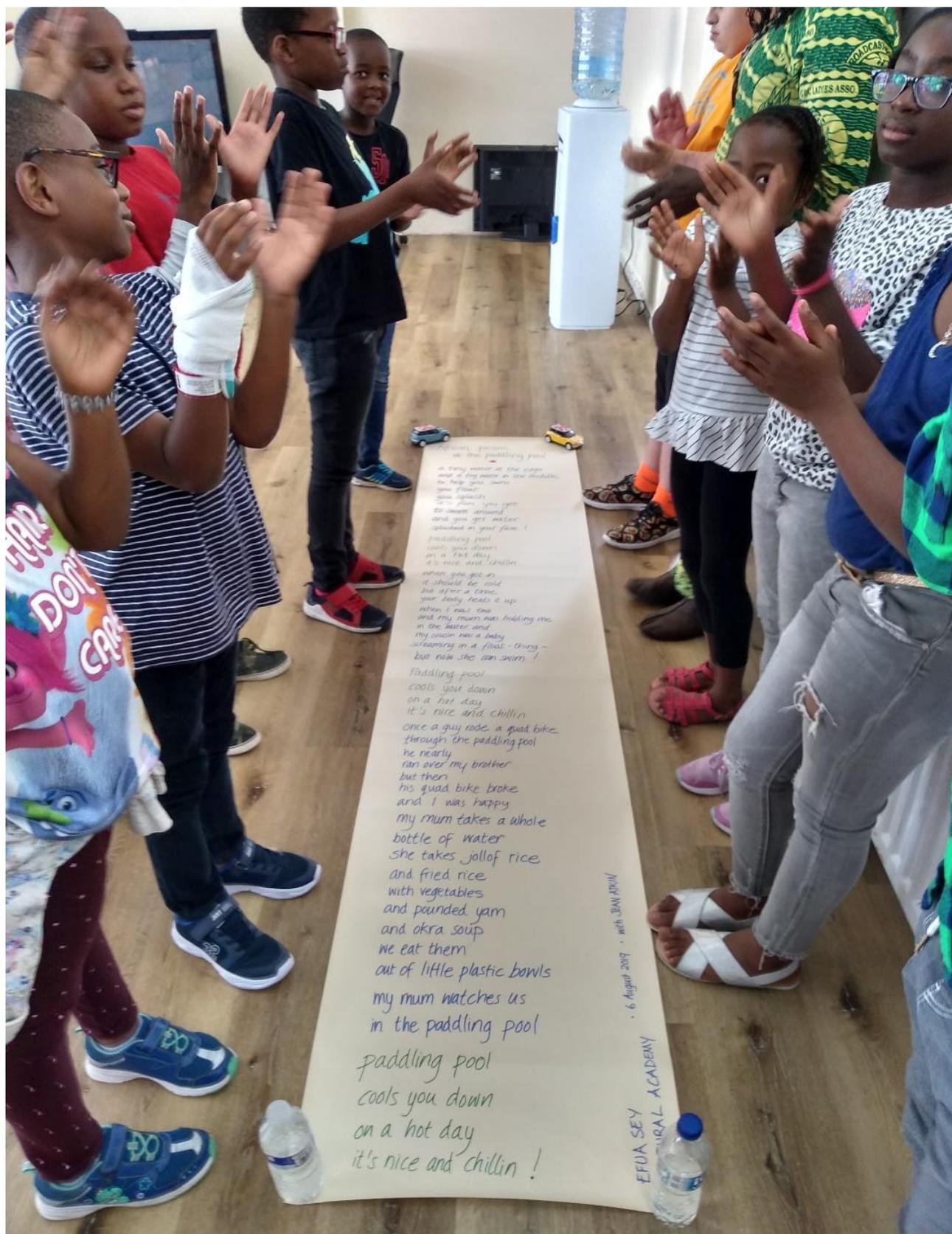
First the children performed The Paddling Pool Poem (written for the purpose) – with actions involving fanning yourself (very hot), making waves (cooling down) foot-stamping (splash!) nose-holding (smelly socks) etc –

hot sticky afternoon
hot sticky feet
very very thirsty
too hot to eat

peel sticky socks
off sweaty feet
wiggle your toes
to a watery beat

breathe blue sky
feel cool pool
stamp wet toes
squeal splashed nose

Then the children were asked to talk about their experiences at Harlow's paddling pools and splash park. Jean captured their words and edited them into a long poem on wallpaper (see image). Meantime the children set to work making tiny books with their own words and drawings. The children also completed the smiley face survey.



African Picnic at the Paddling Pool – a collaborative poem

Again, the children and young people were keen that their poem should be included in the project report and it is therefore provided below:

African Picnic at the Paddling Pool

a tiny water at the edge
 and a big water in the middle
 to help you swim
 you float
 you splash
 it's fun, you get
 to swim around
 and you get
 water splashed in your face!

*paddling pool
 cools you down
 on a hot day
 it's nice and chillin'*
 when you get in
 it should be cold
 but after a time
 your body heats it up
 when I was two
 and my mum was holding me
 in the water and
 my cousin was a baby
 screaming in a float-thing
 – but now she can swim!

*paddling pool
 cools you down
 on a hot day
 it's nice and chillin'*

once a guy rode
 a quad bike through
 the paddling pool
 he nearly
 ran over my brother
 but then
 his quad bike broke
 and I was happy
 my mum takes a whole
 bottle of water
 she takes jollof rice
 and fried rice
 with vegetables
 and pounded yam
 and okra soup

we eat them
out of little plastic bowls
my mum watches us
in the paddling pool

*paddling pool
cools you down
on a hot day
it's nice and chillin'*



Making tiny books about the paddling pools

Playday, Harlow Town Park – 7th August

Playday is the national day for play in the UK, traditionally held on the first Wednesday in August.

Three of the consultant team attended Playday in Harlow Town Park. A table was set up with both short adult surveys and children's smiley face surveys available. The team spoke with members of the public and encouraged them to fill in surveys both at this stall near the bandstand, and at the Town Park pool, where it was noticeable how many families were choosing to be there enjoying a regular day out, despite the annual festivities at the other end of the park..

Sam's Place, Harlow Fields School and College – 14th August

Sam's Place, based at Harlow Fields School and College, provides a wide range of opportunities for social interaction and development for children and young people with a disability. The service welcomes children and young people age 8 to 19 years of age who live in Harlow and the West Essex Area.

The consultants went to Sam's Place to meet with the Council's Senior Community Playworker who introduced the session to the eight young people who were attending that morning and Jean then worked with them one to one.

The project was explained to the children and they were first asked if they visited them.

- Five of the young people said they never visited the paddling pools.
- Of these, one has a younger sister who is not disabled, and she does go.
- Another said that he'd visited when he was little, but now disliked it - 'there's too much screaming'.
- Another said the whole family had been once to Norman Booth and enjoyed it, but it's too far to walk and they'd needed to get a lift. The family lives near to the Staple Tye pool, but even that is too far to walk for this child who has a weak heart.
- One had been when she was little, and had enjoyed it. She hasn't been since and would like to go again.

Jean also spoke with the Senior Playworker and staff, who made the following points:

- they used to take the children and young people who attend Sam's Place to the paddling pools, but now do so much more rarely due to lack of staff (not enough staff to safely walk the children there) – and the fact that if they take a few children out, they cannot provide a service for the rest.
- that originally there were toilets available at the paddling pools at the adjacent community halls – but these are now privately run and no longer accessible. Sam's Place provides for several children with personal care requirements, and without access to toilets, it's not possible to take the children to the paddling pools any more.

School Readiness Programme, Parndon Wood Nature Reserve (14th August) and Harlow Museum Gardens (15th August)

Harlow's School Readiness Programme provides free activities for pre-school age children and their families, with the aim of supporting and helping children to be ready for school.

The Community Engagement Worker, Essex Child and Family Wellbeing Service and Harlow Council's School Readiness Project Organiser) introduced Jean to the groups and she then worked her way round, speaking

one to one with families and children. There was a keen interest in the future of the paddling pools, and again, many people were happy to complete the short survey form.

Jean also collected comments from the adults, such as:

- the paddling pools give us a day out for free
- we take picnics and go for several hours
- we go with friends
- I find them well-managed and the young attendants alert
- I'd like the paddling pools to be open throughout June as well – I think climate change is making the weather more unpredictable in August

From the children Jean collected comments such as:

- I'm up to my knees, I stamp!
- everything gets wet!
- I wear my swimming costume
- my little brother dips his toes
- we all go, it's fun

The children were gathered into a large group to listen to *The Very Hungry Caterpillar*, Jean followed on afterwards to perform the poem she had written for the paddling pools to the children. Jean spoke a line, they spoke it back, and everyone did the actions, involving fanning yourself (very hot), making waves (cooling down) foot-stamping (splash!) nose-holding (smelly socks) etc. This went down well, and was requested again, and more adults requested the short survey form to fill in. Further copies were left with the School Readiness organisers for use at other sessions.



Performing The Paddling Pool Poem with the children in Harlow Museum Gardens

Observations from the activities

In total 134 children and young people provided their views from the engagement activities undertaken. From talking with families, and from working with the children and young people, it is possible to make the following broad observations:

- there is a very strong sense of the value of the paddling pools to family life in Harlow
- great importance is attached to the warm memories people have of themselves playing in the paddling pools, then their own children and grandchildren
- there is a pride in the paddling pools, as a resource most towns don't have
- most people were very supportive of the role of the attendants
- frequently people made the point that the paddling pools are a free resource and as such of great value to families
- many people use the pools regularly, meet with friends and family, take picnics
- again and again, the lack of toilets by the paddling pools was mentioned

From talking to the disabled children attending Sam's Place, it was clear there were problems:

- only a minority of the disabled children had ever visited any of the pools, and no-one attended regularly
- staff confirmed the lack of toilets as a significant barrier

However, speaking with the young children attending the Efua Sey Cultural Academy and the School Readiness Programme, the view was very positive:

- you float, you splash, you swim!
- it helps you to learn to swim
- everything gets wet!
- I wear my swimming costume
- my little brother dips his toes
- it cools you down
- we go every week!

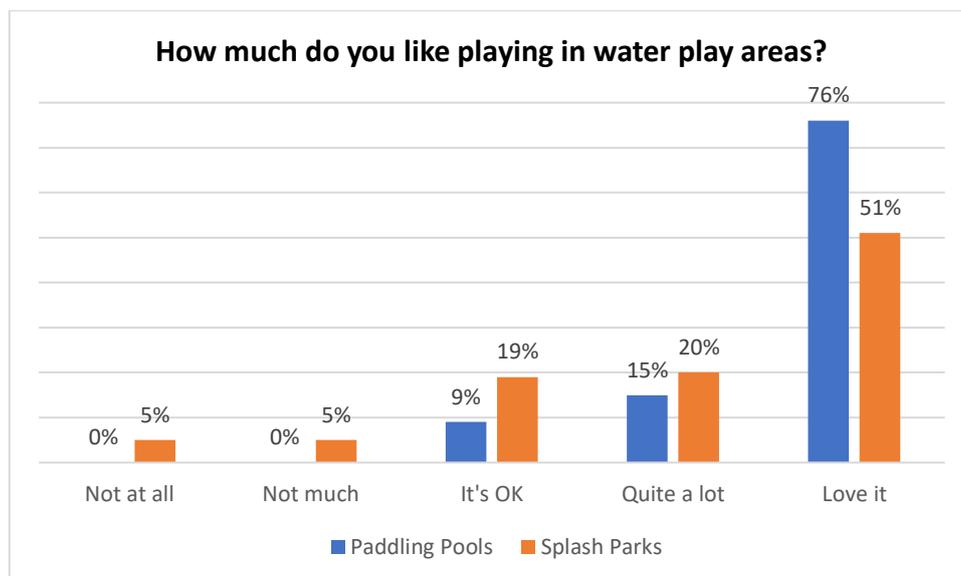
The teenagers at Harlow Youth Council had warm memories of the paddling pools from when they were younger, but they added:

- we use it in winter, for skateboarding
- people like paddling pools, they're a destination
- and now, we don't paddle any more, we'd just splash each other, but it's chillin' just sitting there, socialising
- splash parks are fun, but the paddling pool is more social
- not everyone knows what to expect from a splash park
- or you could have a bit of both, a paddling pool with holes under the surface so the water comes up through. That might be fun.

4.2 Children's survey

The results of the children's survey are as follows:

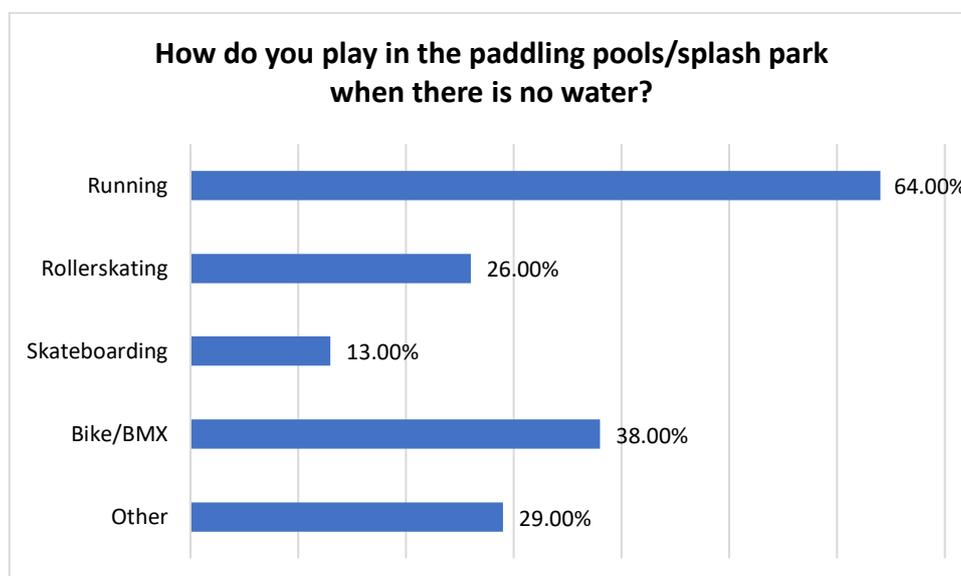
Question 1: How much do you like playing in paddling pools and splash parks? (Scale of 1 to 5)



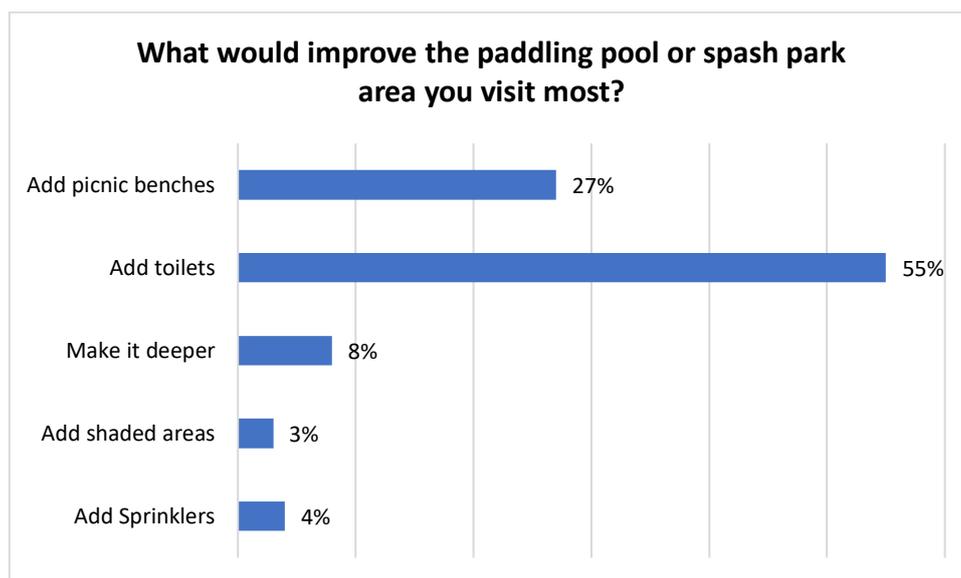
Question 2: Do you play in the paddling pools when they're empty?

Yes: 55% No: 45%

Question 3: How do you play in the paddling pools/splash park when there is no water?



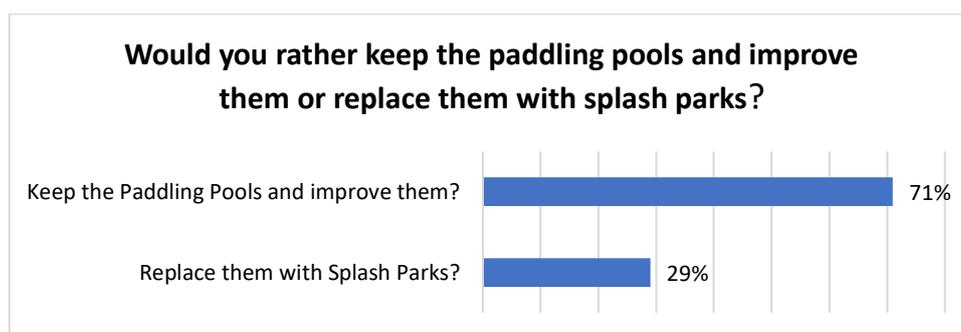
Question 4: What would improve the paddling pool or splash park area you visit most?



Other ideas suggested by the participants in the children's survey were:

- add water slides
- turn baby pool into splash park
- smoother floor
- rent water guns and balls
- café and ice cream
- turn into football pitch
- toys
- a water bouncy castle
- rubber flooring
- changing rooms
- better cleanliness
- add nearby sandpit

Question 5: Would you rather – keep the paddling pools and improve them? Or replace them with splash parks?



Observations from the children's survey

- Water-play is overwhelmingly valued by participants in the survey - 76% responded 'Love it' for paddling pools and 51% said 'Love it' for splash parks.
- The paddling pools are used when empty by 55% of respondents for activities (in order of popularity): running, bike/BMX, 'other', rollerskating and skateboarding.
- 55% of respondents would like to see toilets added to the paddling pool facilities, and 27% would like picnic benches.
- The young people made various suggestions (see above) for additional ideas that might improve facilities. What this certainly demonstrates is a strong interest in, and commitment to, their local paddling pools.
- 71% of respondents want to keep the paddling pools and improve them. 29% of children and young people would like to see them replaced with splash parks.

4.3 Summary of Findings

From working with the children and young people, speaking with parents and families and from the children's survey it is possible to make the following broad observations:

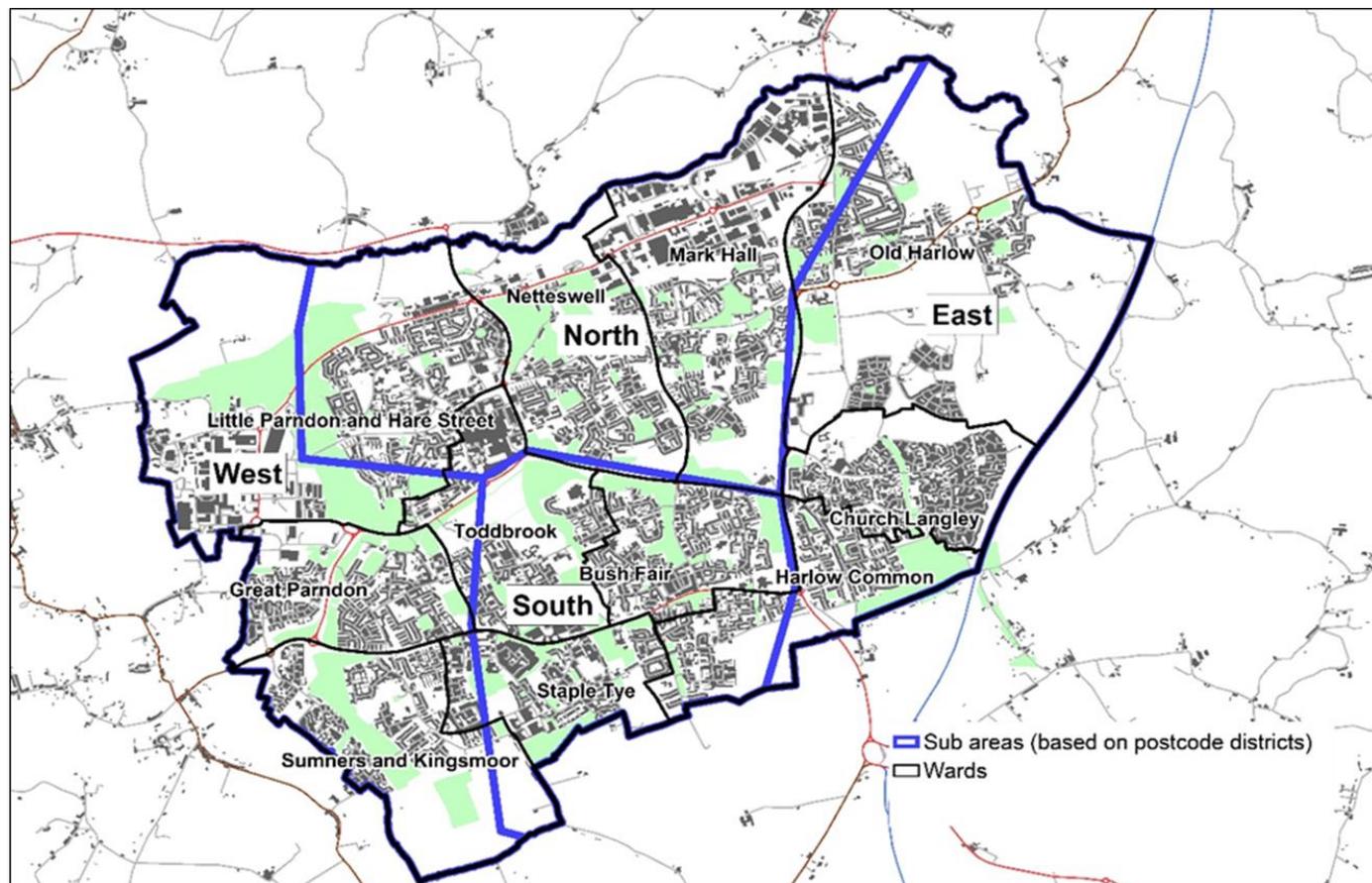
- children and young people affirmed a great pleasure in water play and their access to the paddling pools and splash park – it's clearly something they feel strongly about
- there is a very strong sense in the community of the value of the paddling pools to family life in Harlow
- great importance is attached to the warm memories people have of themselves playing in the paddling pools, then their own children and grandchildren
- there is a pride in the paddling pools, as a resource most towns don't have
- there is some interest in developing splash parks, particularly among younger people. Discussions suggest that many people are unsure what a splash park would in fact be like, and do not want to lose the familiar paddling pools they already have
- most people were very supportive of the role of the attendants
- people frequently made the point that the water play facilities are a free resource and as such of great value to families
- many people use the water play facilities regularly, meet with friends and family and take picnics
- the paddling pools are also in frequent use when empty, with children and young people using them to play and run about in, or for bike/BMX, rollerskating and skateboarding and other play activities
- again and again, from all groups, the lack of toilets by the water play sites was mentioned, and this is seen as the most important improvement

However, talking to the disabled children attending Sam's Place, it was clear there were some specific problems:

- only a minority of the disabled children had ever visited any of the pools, and not one attended regularly
- staff confirmed the lack of toilets as a significant barrier to disabled children.

5. Sub Area profile - variances across Harlow

It was important to gain insight into any variations in responses across the local authority based on the nature of response, geography, and demographic characteristics. To do this it was decided to break down the local authority into 4 discrete sub areas (North, South East, West); and, where appropriate, draw out any significant patterns of response that might have been influenced by local circumstances found in each of the sub areas. Appendix 4 - Sub Area Profile covers these matters.



Part A of the appendix explains:

- How the sub areas were defined and which areas they cover;
- The distribution of population across the sub areas;
- The distribution of children young people across the sub areas; and,
- The social and economic characteristics of the 4 sub areas, as identified by official measures and indicators.

Part B of the appendix considers noteworthy points, similarities and differences in response across the 4 sub areas in respect where these are felt to be particularly relevant to the findings and conclusions of the overall consultation. Broadly speaking there is little significant variance in responses between the sub areas.

The Appendix illustrates with mapping and charts the following key conclusions based on the sub area analyses.

- The 6 facilities covered by this report relate reasonably well to the several of the most heavily populated areas, although it is evident that some areas may be better served than others.
- The five paddling pools were developed in the earlier years of the new town's development. Therefore, more recent residential development may not be as well-served in terms of convenient access to these facilities, and especially by foot.

- Existing provision is not especially well related to the principal locations of children and young people in several parts of the local authority: especially when considering access by foot and bike. It must again be emphasised that as this is a snapshot in time, which does not account for longer-term changes that may occur in the distribution of children and young people as the local demographic structure changes, and the town itself evolves.
- With one exception (Norman Booth) the paddling pools and splash park relate well to some (but not all) of the most deprived parts of the local authority.

Preferred options for development

In terms of the responses from each sub area as they relate to each of the six facilities covered by this report, the following can be concluded about the preferred future options for each venue.

- There is a clear preference across the local authority to *retain the Town Park Paddling Pool* as such a facility
- In terms of responses by sub area of residence, 3 out of 4 sub areas expressed a strong preference to *retain the Bush Fair Paddling Pool* as such a facility. The only exception was for residents from the East sub area, the majority of which had no opinion.
- There is a clear preference across the local authority to *retain the Norman Booth Paddling Pool* as such a facility.
- There is a clear preference across the local authority to *retain the Potter Street Splash Park* as such a facility.
- In terms of responses by sub area of residence, 3 out of 4 sub areas expressed a strong preference to *retain the Staple Tye Paddling Pool* as such a facility. The only exception was for residents from the East sub area, the majority of which had no opinion.
- In terms of responses by sub area of residence, 3 out of 4 sub areas expressed a strong preference to *retain the Sumners Paddling Pool* as such a facility. The only exception was for residents from the East sub area, where there was a shared majority between 'no opinion' and 'paddling pool'.

Use of and access to facilities

The following can be concluded about usage of the facilities:

- The *Bush Fair Paddling Pool* has been visited by respondents from all four sub areas. It is most used by respondents from the South sub area (where it is located)
- Many respondents across the local authority stated that they visit or have visited the *Harlow Town Park Paddling Pool*. It is most used by respondents from the North sub area (where it is located)
- Many respondents across the local authority stated that they visit or have visited the *Norman Booth Paddling Pool*. It is most used by respondents from the East sub area (where it is located)
- Many respondents across the local authority stated that they visit or have visited the *Potter Street Splash Park*. It is most used by respondents from the East sub area (where it is located)
- The *Staple Tye Paddling Pool* has been visited by respondents from across the four sub areas. Although it is located in the West sub area, it is respondents from the South sub area that appear to use it the most. (The facility lies close to the shared border of these two sub areas).
- The *Sumners Paddling Pool* has been visited by respondents from across the four sub areas in significant numbers. However, it is used most by respondents from the West sub area (in which it is located).

In respect of where visitors to the 6 facilities live the following can be concluded about how they normally travelled to the venues, and their length of journey.

- **Bush Fair (South sub area):** Respondents living locally, within the South sub area largely walk to this facility. The pool is also well-used by respondents in the North sub area, but the majority of whom will drive/be driven. Up to 10 minutes appears to be the time it takes to travel to the pool by most local users.
- **Town Park (North sub area):** For respondents from the North sub area (where this pool is located) the majority will walk. However, for respondents in other sub areas there is a heavily reliance on driving/being driven. The Town Park obviously has more amenities and attractions than the local parks in which the other pools and splash park are situated. Journey times are often longer than 10 minutes longer, indicating that many users travel further.
- **Norman Booth (East sub area):** Most respondents from all of the sub areas rely heavily on driving/being driven to this venue- including local respondents from the east sub area (in which this pool is located). Journey times are often longer than 10 minutes longer, indicating that many users travel further. Most locals will take between 1 -15 minutes to get to the venue.
- **Potter Street (East sub area):** Most respondents from all of the sub areas rely heavily on driving/being driven to this venue. Even those respondents from the East sub area (in which this pool is located) many respondents drive/or driven. Journey times are often longer than 10 minutes longer, indicating that many users travel further. Most locals will take between 1 -15 minutes to get to the venue.
- **Staple Tye (West sub area):** As this pool is located on the shared border between West and East sub areas, it is perhaps unsurprising that large numbers of respondents from these areas walk to the facility. The large majority of respondents from other sub areas drive/are driven to the venue. Most locals will take between 1 -15 minutes to get to the venue.
- **Sumners (West sub area):** The majority of respondents from the South sub area state that they walk to this facility- indicating that it is probably easy to get to (the pool is located in the West sub area) and whilst the majority of respondents from this host sub area also walk to the venue, it is not as many as from the South sub area. Journey times are often longer than 10 minutes longer, indicating that many users travel further. Most locals will take between 1 -15 minutes to get to the venue.

Barriers to Access

The large majority of respondents from all four sub areas feel that time and distance is not a barrier to making visits to the paddling pools or splash park. Of those who did think time or distance was a barrier to use, large majorities of respondents from all the sub areas suggested there was no need for additional provision near where they live.

6. Observations, Conclusions and Recommendations

The survey work and stakeholder engagement have provided a range of views from a wide cross section of Harlow's children, young people, parents and carers and community organisations. The response levels to the residents' household survey has been particularly high and there is a strong degree of consistency across the various sources from which we can be confident that the findings are robust and reliable. The information and findings from the consultation report provide a useful source of evidence to feed into the wider review of Harlow's paddling pools.

Residents of Harlow overwhelmingly welcomed being asked about their views of the paddling pools and will no doubt be very interested in both the outcome of this consultation and any decisions that it may lead to. In the interests of transparency and as good practice, it is suggested that the council publish a reasonably extensive executive summary of this report and make it widely available, with the full report presumably also being available to those who wish to read it.

Residents clearly value the pools as important local play/recreation facilities, part of the heritage of the town and recognise the benefits they provide for children, young people, parents/carers and the wider community. The Town Park site, in particular, is something of an iconic community hub, not only an important destination to the family life for so many residents, but widely recognised as part of the character of the town.

It is notable that when looking at options for the future, residents tend to opt for what they know i.e. people want paddling pools where they use them and a splash park where they use it (i.e. Potter Street response).

Replacing any of the existing paddling pools with splash parks without further community engagement at the local level is likely to be unpopular with a large number of residents. If the council does decide to press ahead with such a plan on any of the sites, it would be advised to address other concerns as part of a package, particularly the widely expressed need for toilets and other facilities at the sites.

Residents may be more willing to support the conversion of some of the sites into splash parks if there is a clear commitment and plan for improvements to be made to each of them, with toilets, again, being the clear popular priority.

The inaccessibility of the sites to disabled children should be cause concern. Now that this has been identified, the provision of toilets including accessible toilets and changing facilities would considerably mitigate this.

In conclusion it is recommended that the council, subject to other considerations emerging from the review, should consider announcing a long-term commitment to: -

- Improve all the sites over an agreed timeframe - including in particular, the provision of toilets. In this respect as well as new provision, consideration could perhaps be made of negotiating with the nearby indoor community facilities to gain access to toilets for the six-week opening period and/or providing portable toilet units.
- Retain the paddling pools, at least at the three most popular sites (Town Park, Norman Booth and Summers), but with a staged renovation programme that should include renewing the underwater surfaces (less of a priority it appears at Norman Booth than the others) and the provision of more seating for parents/carers.
- Consider the feasibility of introducing splash park features to the Town Park pool, but without fundamentally altering, so much as enhancing, its current identity as a paddling pool.

- Consider further, more local, community consultation on any plans to fundamentally change any of the individual sites, other than the improvements identified by this current consultation.
- Monitor, over time, the community's response to any incremental or staged changes to any of the sites, in order to make well-informed decisions about further possible changes.
- Future provision in areas of growth should be kept under review. i.e. there are parts of Harlow where there has been recent growth, and are not as well served in terms of access to either paddling pools or splash pads.