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**Waste Management, Culture, and Leisure Policy Board**

**6 May 2011**

**Report by the Research and Consultation Officer**

**Consultation Report on Emslie Horniman’s Pleasance**

1. **Background**

1.1 During October and November 2010, the Research and Consultation team in SSD ran a consultation about possible improvements to Emslie Horniman’s Pleasance, in line with the Borough’s 10 year Park Strategy. We wanted to find out what people thought about the park, and what their priorities and suggestions for improvement might be. As with all the Parks Strategy consultations, this was primarily a discussion about what we might do rather than a consultation on initial proposals. We did consult on two specific proposals, to plant a wildflower meadow and to reintroduce lighting in the games area.

1.2 We wrote to the 4,000 households and businesses closest to the park, and received 112 replies to a questionnaire. This was a low rate of return, however this was anticipated from previous surveys so in addition, we held two afternoon events in the park, one at the weekend, for people to tell us their views. Between 30 and 40 people came to each session. We also did a school gate session with 12 parents from Middle Row School. We worked with the school council (eight children) at St Thomas’ school, had plans and ideas from 62 children at Middle Row, and feedback from the Head of the Stephenson School, and talked to 10 young people and staff at the Golborne Youth Centre. We visited the Horniman’s Adventure playground to talk to four staff and around ten children there, and spoke to the parks police and Quadron staff. The Council’s Children’s Forum (eight children) also had a workshop session looking at the park and the playground in detail. The Golborne Forum gave suggestions for improvements at a board meeting.

1.3 Overall we heard from approximately 300 people who visit the park, some more regularly than others, but all with views on what should happen to it in future.

**2.0 Support for the park**

2.1 Emslie Horniman’s Pleasance is a well used local park. 56 per cent of survey respondents said they visit at least once a week, and many of the parents we spoke to were regular after school visitors. Many People who spoke to us at the events in the park commented on how well looked after it is, and that it feels like a safe park with not too much anti-social behaviour - though some said this has been a relatively recent improvement. Those park users who spoke to us, or returned questionnaires tend to appreciate the open space in a built-up area, the wildlife, the quiet garden and the playgrounds. Most people recognised that the park could do with some updating now, particularly in some areas.

 “*My preference is for something for everyone, a place to relax for older people, and a place to enjoy for young people, to keep them interested and off the streets” –* survey respondent

**3.0 Priorities for improvement.**

3.1 The results from the postal survey and from face to face discussions are similar. The chart below shows the percentage of survey respondents who thought various aspects of the park needed improvement.

3.2 Toilets, seating and the toddler playground were the top three requests for improvement. Respondents were least concerned about footpaths, trees and the stepped area of the park (near Kensal Road)

3.3 As with other parks, people were not generally in favour of radical change in the park, but wanted the Council to make the most of the elements already in the park, and improve them. The following paragraphs summarise the opinions of both survey and face to face respondents.

Table 1

 **The toddler (teletubby) playground**

3.4 Improving the playground was a priority for many respondents - indeed when talking about the ‘park’ a number of people assumed we were only talking about the playground. We were told many times about the playground’s history - appearing in an episode of Teletubbies - and it seems to be well loved, although people felt it is no longer as well used as it needs improvement.

3.5 The hills in the playground are part of this identity but they divide opinion. Some parents felt they were dangerous, largely because of children riding bikes and scooters down them and risking collisions. Others thought them unique and valuable in teaching children about running and climbing on different surfaces.

3.6 The lack of shade was an issue for many parents, and a local school, who said that in the summer the playground gets almost too hot to use, also because of the glare of the sun reflecting on the white walls and metal fencing. Some asked for any sort of shade, a few were more specific in asking for tree shade.

3.7 We asked whether people thought it would be a good idea to remove the fence and wall from the park side of the playground and give the park a more open feel. The general consensus was that some sort of divide is good, for those with younger children so that they can’t get out of the playground easily, however greater visibility would be good for those with older children who are on the other side of the park at the pathfinder playground, so some sort of fencing that can be easily seen through would be good. One parent suggested edible fences, planted with thornless berry bushes as an option. A couple of people thought that adding another gate into the playground on the park side would be a good idea to improve visibilty/ accesibility of it as well. The Golborne Forum supported the idea of removing the wall into the park, and suggested looking at Avondale Park as an example of good practice in playground improvements. A local school reported that children get their fingers stuck in the holes of the current fence so any replacement should have larger holes.

3.8 The flooring of the playground came in for criticism, as the whole floor area is not currently soft, and people felt it would be safer if it was soft.. Some also asked whether it could be made to feel a bit more natural, with some planting. Some asked for the walls to be painted bright colours, others wanted them to stay white.

3.9 Seating for parents was also raised as an issue, the seating is in need of repair. Some people thought there should be more seating as the playground gets so busy. A few thought seats in different areas would be good, particularly as the hills create blind spots for the current seating area. One parent suggested picnic benches in the playground to make it more sociable and enable people to eat food from the cafe there more easily.

3.10 Other comments from parents included the need for signs to restrict bikes/scooters within the playground, and age appropriate signs for equipment.

3.11 Specific requests on equipment and children’s views on the playground are presented in Appendix One. The Children’s Forum and local schools have expressed interest in being involved in fine tuning any new playground design.

 **Points to consider:**

* Provide shade for the playground
* Replace the wall with a fence to improve visibility
* Put another entrance into the playground
* Redesign the playground with the comments in Appendix 1 in mind
* Involve children further in the playground design working with contractors

**3.12 PARKS MANAGEMENT RESPONSE:** *We will repeat the successful formula used in Avondale and the wider Play Pathfinder project. This will mean using the professional expertise of colleagues in the Family and Children’s Services directorate and the Children’s Forum in the design and procurement of a new playground. The points made here are all valid and will be included in the specification.*

 **The Voysey Garden**

3.13 The Voysey Garden - known to many as the Secret Garden - is a source of frustration to many park users. Those who have been visiting the park for several years remember it being open, and are baffled by why it can’t be open now, and others who have never seen it open questioned why it is there if it can’t be used. A few people commented on the lack of information about the park’s history, and the Voysey Garden, and felt this would be a good addition to the park particularly with the centenary coming up.

3.14 Many people speculated about why the garden was closed, and the most common view was that the water inside the garden was considered unsafe (though people didn’t agree). Almost everyone who mentioned the garden felt that it should be reopened to some degree - either at certain times of the day (eg for people having lunch) or certain times of the week (eg at weekends) Some felt that there should be some sort of warden to look after it, or keep an eye on children, others did not. Children themselves suggested it should be open before school closing time so that it could be a quiet area. One of the members of the Children’s Forum suggested it should be turned into an open air cafe, and this suggestion was echoed by several other park users who thought it should be an extension of the kiosk area. Some suggested that if it can’t be opened, it could be used to house animals or birds for people to look at.

3.15 The general view was that having the garden, spending time and money on its upkeep is of very little benefit to anyone as it can’t be appreciated by the people using the park. Park users would like to see the garden opened in some capacity.

 **Points to consider:**

* Open the Voysey Garden for specific hours per day or days per week
* Improve seating in the Voysey Garden for people using the kiosk
* Provide information about the park’s history in the Voysey Garden

**3.16 PARKS MANAGEMENT RESPONSE:** *2013 is the centenary of the Voysey Garden. The health and safety concerns are regrettably valid. We will therefore work on developing a team of volunteers to supervise the opening of the area at various times in fine weather. Suitable interpretation materials will be developed. It may be possible to develop closer links with the café.*

 **The toilets**

3.17 The toilets were universally condemned as dirty, inappropriate, and in dire need of replacing.

3.18 The most common complaints were how dirty they were, with missing toilet paper, no soap, and filthy floors and toilets. One mother said “I would move heaven and earth not to have to use those toilets”.

3.19 Parents in particular were very unhappy with the shared toilets for both genders, and several gave examples of taking young children to the toilet and seeing men using the toilet when they walked in. They were very keen to see separate toilets for male and female, and many people asked if the toilets that are in the Voysey garden could be reopened - reconfiguring the fencing if necessary, so that people felt safer using the toilets in the park. Several people also commented on the lack of suitable changing facilities for babies.

 **Points to consider:**

* Reopen the toilets in the Voysey Garden for public use
* Provide separate toilets for males and females
* Provide baby changing facilities
* Ensure toilets are cleaned and checked regularly

**3.20 PARKS MANAGEMENT RESPONSE:** *We agree and will refurbish these completely. We will look for alternatives to the existing access arrangements. Maintenance issues and baby changing facilities will be addressed.*

 **The Quiet Garden**

3.21 Views on the quiet garden, and what should be done with the area of grass next to it, were mixed. A few people used the area and appreciated its quiet nature, but there were a lot of reports of the area becoming the new unofficial dog run and toilet, since we removed the dog run in the northeast corner. Parents at the playground were worried about drinkers and drug users hanging around in the area, and because it is secluded, don’t like their children to use that part of the park.

3.22 Many people commented on the individual features of the area, and the bird bath and stone chairs are popular. Perhaps the most popular for expanding the area included having a wildlife area, with log piles and specific plants to attract insects and wildlife, and bird feeders to attract birds. More seating, particularly picnic benches was also commonly mentioned. Other suggestions included an outdoor gym, a mother and baby area, more play equipment, a flower bed designed by local schools, edible fencing, and a wildflower garden. Several people thought it was a good place for more public art, specifically sculptures.

3.23 There were also contrasting suggestions for the area to be made into an enclosed dog exercise area, or into a dog free area.

 **Points to consider:**

* Develop a wildlife area next to the quiet garden
* Put more seating into the garden
* Make the area dog free
* Install outdoor gym equipment
* Involve local schools in design of flower bed or public art
* Replace some of the shrubs with edible fencing (soft fruit bushes)

**3.24 PARKS MANAGEMENT RESPONSE:** *We will look closely at all these suggestions which we do not view as being necessarily exclusive. A combination of some of them may resolve the wider concerns.*

 **Dog toilets**

3.25 There were no real supporters of the dog toilets in the park, and quite a few objectors to them. People with dogs said their dogs don’t like them, and people with children were worried that children might play in them - because they are not well used they look more like sandpits. Two people said they had personally run over to stop children getting into them. Several people commented on the lack of signs, and felt that people may well not know what they were. The park staff said that temporary signs had been put onto the dog toilets repeatedly but kept being torn off. The adventure playground staff were also particularly worried about the dog toilets and felt that much better signage is needed to make sure people know what they are for.

3.26 Parents were especially concerned about the location of the dog toilet near the pathfinder playground - they thought it should not be so near to a play area and asked for it to be moved.

3.27 Several people commented that the streets around the park now had a lot more dog mess on them because the removal of the dog area means there is no dog toilet accessible after the park is closed, and especially in winter this means that dog walkers in the evening can’t use the dog toilets.

 **Points to consider**

* Removal of dog toilets
* Move the northern dog toilet further away from the pathfinder playground
* Make one of the toilets accessible to park users after dusk
* Put permanent signs and information about dangers of dog faeces up at both dog toilets

**3.28 PARKS MANAGEMENT RESPONSE:** *We are committed to providing sand pit dog toilets with permanent signs but their location within the park will be reviewed. Ideally they need to near a main entrance. After-hours access (as was previously possible) will be reviewed.*

 **Grass area**

3.29 On the whole people were happy with the grass area, most thought it was important to have a large space where people can play games and run around. Several people mentioned problems with drainage in winter, and the grass drying out and disappearing in summer. Several survey respondents mentioned the problem of dog mess on the large grass area, and their dislike of dogs off leads in the park generally. Suggestions for improving the grass area included having portable goals for a football area (from young people), an outdoor gym, and more picnic tables. Several people also asked for a water fountain as they did not want to have to buy bottled water from the kiosk.

3.30 A couple of people objected to the park being used for Carnival and felt that they were unfairly footing the repair bill.

 **Points to consider**

* Improve drainage at the southern end of the grass area
* Install more picnic benches
* Install outdoor gym equipment
* Install a water fountain

**3.31 PARKS MANAGEMENT RESPONSE:** *The drainage has been studied extensively and unfortunately there is little that can be done short of re-landscaping the whole area. We agree on the need for more picnic benches and for a drinking fountain in the park. We will look for a suitable location for outdoor gym equipment – but feel this is not the right area as it could interfere with the large events staged in the park. These popular events may be intrusive to some residents, but their impact upon the park is minimal and it quickly recovers.*

 **Seating**

3.32 This was one of the most commonly mentioned areas for improvement. Many people asked for more seating and picnic benches so that people could enjoy the park more. Specific requests included more seating near the pathfinder playground so that parents could keep an eye on children playing there, more picnic benches and more seating in the quiet garden.

* Extra seating near the pathfinder playground
* More picnic benches
* More seating in the quiet garden

**3.33 PARKS MANAGEMENT RESPONSE:** *We agree and will include more seats in all these areas.*

 **Games Court and changing rooms**

3.34 The main concerns about the games court amongst people who use it were drainage and surfacing. The staff at the Horniman’s Adventure playground reported that when it has rained it is often unusable as large puddles stay on the court. They, and several other park users, also said that the surfacing of the court should be changed, as the concrete is too hard for children to play on and causes injuries when they fall. Children and young people we spoke to also asked for the surfacing to be softer, and several said they did not use the court because they hurt themselves playing on it.

3.35 In the postal survey, nearly three quarters (72 per cent) of people supported the idea of restoring the floodlights for the games court. The staff at the adventure playground also strongly supported this idea, as during the winter months they are unable to use the games court during their opening hours, but would like to as they have a contract with the Council for its use. Some people opposed restoring the lights as they live nearby; others thought it was a waste of energy or money.

3.36 Although just over 40 per cent of survey respondents said the changing rooms should be improved, few people seemed to have very strong opinions on them– indeed many people we spoke to didn’t realise they were there, and thought they should be better publicised to increase use of the games court. Those who commented on them thought they should be cleaner, or redone. Some were frustrated that they didn’t seem to be open most of the time. One parent suggested local schools should be given keys to the changing rooms to promote use of the court.

 **Points to consider**

* Improve the surfacing of the games court
* Improve the drainage on the games court
* Restore floodlights on some basis
* Revisit the contract for Horniman’s Adventure’s use of the games court
* Refurbish and advertise changing facilities

**3.37 PARKS MANAGEMENT RESPONSE:** *The games area has started to collapse and accordingly we propose replacing the whole area with a Multi-Use Games Area (MUGA) as recently installed in Avondale and St. Luke’s Gardens. The changing rooms will be refurbished. Lighting options will be studied carefully so that if lights are included, they are manageable to minimize the impact on local residents living nearby. We are content with the arrangements governing the day to day management of the area by Quadron, the borough’s ground maintenance contractor. Experience has shown that a new MUGA will be used much more by local schools and clubs.*

 **Flowers, shrubs and trees**

3.38 Just under 40 per cent of survey respondents said the flowers and shrubs in the park should be improved. Several people asked that the shrubbery around the entrances to the park on Bosworth Road be cut back to improve the sightlines to the exits, and the view into the Quiet Garden from other areas of the park. Some also commented that the flowers could be more colourful, and that there are too many plants with thorns, particularly near the benches in front of the Voysey Garden. There were also several compliments about how well maintained the park was.

3.39 Most people appreciated the trees in the park, and felt they should be preserved, however some were concerned about the dead tree near the Quiet Garden and asked this should be surveyed to make sure it is safe, or removed. A few people asked for more trees to be planted

 **Points to consider**

* Improve sightlines to Bosworth Road entrances/ the quiet garden
* Review planting schemes

**3.40 PARKS MANAGEMENT RESPONSE:** *The basic horticulture of the park is generally dull and uninteresting. We will look at these proposals and look for opportunities to brighten the park generally. The recent addition of annual bedding in summer has helped – but more needs doing.*

 **Park staff**

3.41 The park staff came in for both praise and criticism from park users. Many people said the park is well maintained and the staff do a good job keeping it clean and tidy, however some were disappointed that the staff accommodation is now fairly inaccessible for people in the park, and felt that the staff were not seen as often because of this. Some also said they were not very proactive about stopping dogs fouling the grass. Some people requested full time park keepers as one of their suggestions for improvement – suggesting they are not aware that the staff are there.

 **Points to consider**

* Relocate staff accommodation to make it more accessible to park users

**3.42 PARKS MANAGEMENT RESPONSE:** *The staff accommodation was moved from above the café on account of extensive anti-social behavior. Operationally the current base makes greater sense (access to the street for materials etc). We will re-examine this and see if how to make the staff more visible and accessible to visitors. We will look at how to improve support from the parks police for the staff when dealing with dog fouling.*

 **Signage and information**

3.43 Improving signage and information was not a high priority from the survey, however there were some comments by park users at the open days and at other sessions about them. The Children’s Forum, most of whom were visiting the park for the first time, felt that the signs were not clear, and at Kensal Road were obstructed by the shrubbery. They also noted that the clocks showing the opening times were not showing the right times. They thought that there should be more, clearer signage at the entrance to let people know what is in the park to attract them to go in.

3.44 Others including the parks police commented that the signs were difficult to read because of the lack of contrast between the background and the lettering (grey on grey), and that the contact information for parks staff is out of date. One resident commented on the signs at the entrance, saying they were not in keeping with the park and were an eyesore.

 **Points to consider**

* Improve the contrast/visibility of signs in the park
* Update the contact information and opening hours information at entrances
	1. **PARKS MANAGEMENT RESPONSE:** *We entirely agree. The signs and interpretation of the park need to be revised completely.*

 **Footpaths**

3.46 The main feedback about footpaths was about the stones surrounding the paths rather than the paths themselves. Many people said that the stones should be removed, as vandals chip them out and then use them to throw at the park building (windows have been broken several times in recent past).

 **Points to consider**

* Remove the cobblestones from the sides of the footpaths

**3.47 PARKS MANAGEMENT RESPONSE:** *We agree. The cobbles will be lifted and replaced with a solid textured surface in order to preserve the design.*

 **The kiosk**

3.48 The kiosk is a very popular feature of the park, particularly with parents of children at the nearby schools. Just over 40 per cent of survey respondents thought the kiosk should be improved. Suggestions for improving it were tables and chairs outside (permanently fixed) so that people could sit and eat or drink there, and a wider menu including more healthy options. A few people asked for a proper café (either in the park building or using the Voysey Garden).

**Points to consider**

* Put in tables and chairs outside the kiosk
* Improve the menu to include more healthy food
* Make the kiosk into a cafe

**3.49 PARKS MANAGEMENT RESPONSE:** *We will look at these proposals and work with the café licensee on improving the service. The size of the building does limit the range of the menu. Additional furniture will make it a more welcoming experience for all.*

 **The proposed wildflower meadow**

3.50 Ninety three per cent of survey respondents supported a proposal by the parks team of planting a wildflower meadow on the embankment on Kensal Road. In discussions with park users, the majority also supported this idea. However, some respondents were concerned about how it would be looked after to stop people trampling it, and whether it would affect Carnival celebrations. The Golborne Forum suggested that a meadow could be planted at the other end of the park instead, and asked the Council to be mindful of any impact on the Carnival and Portobello Festival celebrations.

**3.51 PARKS MANAGEMENT RESPONSE:** *Fantastic support for an idea that has been successfully introduced elsewhere. We will take these comments on board and believe it should be possible for an accessible meadow to survive being sat upon in late summer.*

 **The stepped area**

3.52 The majority of people were happy with the stepped area, and many commented that they liked having somewhere to sit with a view over the rest of the park. Suggestions for improvement included more planting (including pergola planting) and more benches at the top.

 **Points to consider**

* Add more seats and planting to the top of the stepped area

**3.53 PARKS MANAGEMENT RESPONSE:** *We will provide more seating here.*

**4.0 Other comments and suggestions**

4.1 Many people including local schools thought local people, particularly children, should be involved in the design of new features in the park or playground. Their ideas included designs on the playground walls or floor, designs for a flower bed for the quiet garden, a statue, or a fountain.

4.2 Requests for more lighting in the park came up several times, in the survey in particular.

4.3 Some respondents wanted to see animals, for example, a petting zoo either in the Voysey Garden or the Quiet Garden..

4.4 Some wanted to see sculptures of peacocks around the park (and especially in the Quiet Garden) – to echo Holland Park.

4.5 One person suggested the columns in the park could be put to better use and be fitted with wind turbines or solar panels to generate electricity for the park

4.6 One person suggested the house in the park could be converted to a community centre with activities for local people

4.7 Several parents asked for some organised play activities within the park (such as craft sessions)

4.8 The Children’s Forum suggested a skate park with a graffiti wall.

4.9 Some respondents wanted more community events – for example a dog show.

4.10 And some wanted ice skating in winter or a community group to organize healthy learning and activities for young local people

**4.11 PARKS MANAGEMENT RESPONSE:** *All of these ideas will be considered carefully and, as has been stated earlier, will be used if possible so as to improve the park for local residents and users.*

**5.0 Further involvement**

5.1 76 people said they wanted to be kept informed about changes to the park, and a further 26 said they would be interested in joining a Friends Group (their names have been passed to the parks team). All the schools nearby wanted to stay involved in the improvements process.

**5.2 PARKS MANAGEMENT RESPONSE:** *We are extremely grateful to the colleagues in SSD who led the consultation and the users who came forward to share their views. Many of the concerns raised are echoed in the separate consultation report supplied by the borough’s Residents Survey “mystery shopping” that was carried out independently in the summer of 2010.*

*We will assist with the establishment of a “Friends of EHP” group to help the borough supervise the Voysey Garden and through volunteering with other aspects of the park.*

*The basic message throughout appears to have been that users don’t want a new park – but an improved park: the essential elements are in place and now need renewal and refurbishment.*

**5.3 NEXT STEPS:** *This report will contribute to the Project Initiation Document that is required before work can begin on the Parks Strategy Improvement Programme for Emslie Horniman’s Pleasance.*

**Liz Horsfield**

**Research and Information Officer**