



Parks and Allotments Consultation Feedback

November 2024

Contents

Introduction	3
Summary of Findings	4
Who took part in the consultation?	4
How do people use Newcastle’s parks and green spaces?	4
Which parks do people visit?	4
Why do people use Newcastle’s parks and green spaces?	5
Why do some people not use Newcastle parks?	5
How do people use Newcastle’s allotments?	5
What should our priorities be for parks and green spaces?	6
Increased accessibility for all	6
Improvement of safety and security	6
Improvement of general upkeep and cleaning	6
Improvement of biodiversity	7
Main Findings	8
Profiling	8
Age	8
Sex	9
Disability	10
Ethnicity	10
Connection to the Area	11
Place of Residence: Wards and Postcodes	11
Parks: Engagement and Value	14
Frequency of Visiting Parks	19
Reasons for Infrequent Park Use	20
Primary Means of Travel to Parks	21
Parks: Top Values	22
Allotments: Engagement and Value	25
Allotments: Top Values	28
Future Priorities	29
Parks and Green Spaces: Future Priorities	29
Allotments: Future Priorities	35

Table of Figures

Figure 1: Number of responses / comments by channel	3
Figure 2: How old are you?	9
Figure 3: Are you:.....	9
Figure 4: Do you have any long-standing illness, disability or infirmity?.....	10
Figure 5: To which to these groups do you belong?	10
Figure 6: Are you:.....	11
Figure 7: Please tell us your postcode	12
Figure 8: Distribution of Postcodes	13
Figure 9: Which one park in Newcastle do you visit most often?	15
Figure 10: Park visited most often by long-standing illness / disability	16
Figure 11: Park visited most often by sex.....	16
Figure 12: All Newcastle parks visited	17
Figure 13: All parks visited by age and ethnic group	18
Figure 14: All parks visited by long-standing illness / disability and frequency of visiting parks	18
Figure 15: All parks visited by sex	19
Figure 16: How often do you visit parks in Newcastle?	19
Figure 17: Frequency of visiting parks by long-standing illness / disability	20
Figure 18: Frequency of visiting parks by mode of transport used	20
Figure 19: When you visit Newcastle's parks, how do you get there? (Most common way).....	22
Figure 20: Mode of transport to parks by relationship with Newcastle and frequency of visiting	22
Figure 21: What do you value most about Newcastle's parks? Please tick up to three options.....	24
Figure 22: What people value about parks – how often they visit and whether they have an allotment.....	25
Figure 23: Value by sex and long-standing illness / disability	25
Figure 24: Do you have an allotment?.....	26
Figure 25: Whether people have an allotment, by age	26
Figure 26: Location of allotment	27
Figure 27: What do you value most about Newcastle's allotments? Please tick up to 3 options.....	28
Figure 28: What people value about allotments, compared to whether or not they have an allotment and sex	29

Introduction

This report presents the findings of a Newcastle City Council community consultation about the city's parks and allotments.

The consultation was live 2nd October 2024 – 8th November 2024. It gave residents and key stakeholders a chance to share their views on the future of the city's parks and allotments.

Why was the consultation undertaken?

The consultation was undertaken to ensure that the opinions of residents and community groups are considered in a review of how Newcastle's parks and allotments are managed. Since 2019, 33 parks and over 60 allotments have been managed by Urban Green Newcastle (UGN), a charitable trust established by Newcastle City Council.

How could people take part?

The consultation was promoted by Newcastle City Council via:

- Local media
- Posters and leaflets in parks, community centres and libraries
- Let's Talk Newcastle Online, including direct invites to registered members
- Social media (X, Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn)
- The council website

An online survey on <https://www.letstalknewcastle.co.uk/> was the main way people could share their views. It was also possible to provide feedback via email and social media.

Access requirements were supported through the use of BSL and Easy Read format information.

How many people and organisations took part?

In total, 1,055 people took part in the consultation. Most did so by completing the online survey.

Figure 1: Number of responses / comments by channel

Online Survey	Facebook	Twitter / X	Email
886	63	104	2

Summary of Findings

The headlines from the key questions asked in the consultation are summarised here.

Who took part in the consultation?

The consultation findings should be considered in the context of who has participated. Within the sample:

- 93% are Newcastle residents
- 51% are aged 55 years or above; 11% are aged under 35
- 53% are female; 43% are male
- 22% classify themselves as having a long-standing illness, disability or infirmity
- 90% describe themselves as White or White British; 2% identify with a minority ethnic group

Census data for Newcastle shows that the views of younger residents and residents from minority ethnicities are underrepresented within the consultation findings. Male residents and those with a long-standing illness / disability are also slightly underrepresented within the sample.

How do people use Newcastle's parks and green spaces?

A total of 886 people shared information on how often they use Newcastle's parks. Most are regular park visitors:

- 74% visit once a week or more
- 10% never visit parks or do so less than monthly. This increases to 15% amongst those with a disability, long-standing illness or infirmity

They also usually walk or wheel (travel using a wheelchair, walking frame with wheels, or mobility scooter) when travelling to parks, with 71% of the sample doing so. The next most common way of travelling was by car or van (17%).

Which parks do people visit?

The consultation questionnaire asked respondents to share which Newcastle parks they use - generally and most often.

Answers show that, overall, the top 5 most popular Newcastle parks are:

- **Exhibition Park** (52%)
- **Jesmond Dene** (49%)
- **Leazes Park** (41%)
- **Heaton Park** (35%)
- **Gosforth Central Park** (21%)

However, these are often not the parks people visit most frequently. In fact, no one park stands out as being visited most often. The parks which received most mentions as being visited most often are:

- **Gosforth Central Park** (17%)
- **Jesmond Dene** (15%)
- **Exhibition Park** (13%)
- **Leazes Park** (13%)
- **Heaton Park** (12%)

Why do people use Newcastle's parks and green spaces?

People use Newcastle's parks and green spaces for many reasons, but findings show that things linked to accessibility are most important:

- 'Access to green space' topped the list of things people value most about Newcastle's parks (73%)
- This was followed by 'are free for everyone to use' (47%)

Feedback also shows that parks and green spaces are appreciated for:

- Health and wellbeing, particularly mental health (40%)
- Biodiversity and wildlife (35%)
- Children's play (22%)

Why do some people not use Newcastle parks?

We asked people who do not visit Newcastle parks regularly why. Responses show many reasons, spanning things linked to personal circumstances as well as park specific issues:

- Personal factors which stop people visiting Newcastle parks include a lack of time, access to private green space, distance to travel and, at times, mobility issues restricting access.
- Park specific issues which can stop people visiting link to a perceived lack of parking facilities – often required to support mobility issues, the availability of welfare facilities and concerns around maintenance and personal safety.

How do people use Newcastle's allotments?

We also asked people to tell us about their usage of allotments and what they value about them. 873 respondents answered the question about usage and 710 answered the question about value.

Within the consultation sample, 22% are allotment holders.

Answers show that Newcastle allotments are valued most for the food growing opportunities they offer (66%). They are also valued for being good for people's

mental (58%) and physical (31%) health, as well as the benefits on wildlife and biodiversity (32%).

What should our priorities be for parks and green spaces?

We asked people to tell us about what they feel should be prioritised for the management of parks, allotments and green spaces in Newcastle.

Lots of things were suggested, with them usually falling into one of the following categories:

- Increased accessibility for all
- Improvement of safety and security
- Improvement of general upkeep and cleaning
- Improvement of biodiversity

Increased accessibility for all

People want parks to be free and easy to use. This means:

- Ensuring paths are accessible – including by wheelchair and with buggies – and free of trip hazards
- Improving welfare facilities and making sure they are open and clean
- Maintaining and restoring children's play areas and sports facilities

Improvement of safety and security

People want parks in Newcastle to have better security measures, to tackle ill-behaviour. They would like to see:

- Better lighting and monitored security cameras
- Locking parks overnight
- A staff or volunteer presence in parks
- Harsher measures to tackle crime

Improvement of general upkeep and cleaning

People want to see a big improvement in general upkeep – tree maintenance, weeding, regular grass cutting – and cleanliness. They suggest:

- More ground staff
- Allowing volunteers to work alongside park rangers
- Working in partnership with community organisations
- Increasing the number of secure bins
- Increased litter picking, potentially using volunteers

Pest control in parks is seen to be a necessity, yet something that people feel is being overlooked.

Improvement of biodiversity

People also support measures to encourage and sustain natural and wild habitats within the parks. This activity should be:

- Part of well-maintained parks
- Actively maintained
- Supported by communications, to raise awareness of the benefits

What should our priorities be for allotments?

Allotment holders also think that accessibility, safety and security, general upkeep and biodiversity are important.

It is a particular priority that allotments are safe and secure, free from worry – from both people and unwanted pests i.e. rats.

There is a call to support accessibility by keeping allotment rents low and by introducing more allotment space to meet demand.

There is also a clear wish for more support, active engagement and communication from those in charge of managing the allotments.

Main Findings

This section of the report outlines the detailed findings from the consultation, across the following sections:

- Sample Profile
- Parks: Engagement and Value
- Allotments: Engagement and Value
- Future Priorities

Findings are shown in charts and tables as appropriate, with a supporting commentary which highlights the important themes emerging.

Significant differences in behaviour and or opinions within audience profiles are presented in tables, based on statistical testing undertaken at a 95% confidence level.

Significantly higher findings are highlighted by a **red figure** and significantly lower findings are highlighted by a **blue figure**.

Profiling

People's demographics are known to shape their opinions and behaviours and so it is important to consider the profile of who has taken part when interpreting the consultation's findings.

We collected the following demographic information from our consultation sample:

- Age
- Sex
- Disability
- Ethnicity
- Connection to the area
- Place of residence

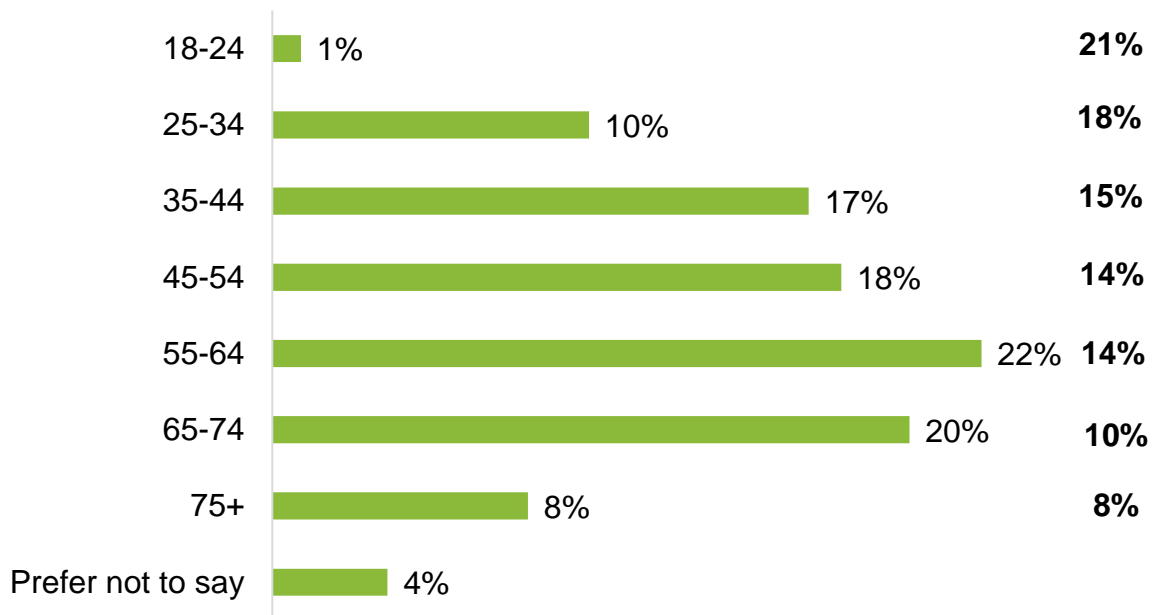
Age

There is a broad spread of age groups present within the consultation sample, with 1 in 2 being aged 55 or over (51%). Approximately 1 in 10 respondents are under the age of 35 (11%).

Census data for Newcastle shows that young people, particularly those aged 18 to 24 years, are underrepresented within the consultation.

Figure 2: How old are you?

**Newcastle:
Census 2021**



Number of respondents: (880)

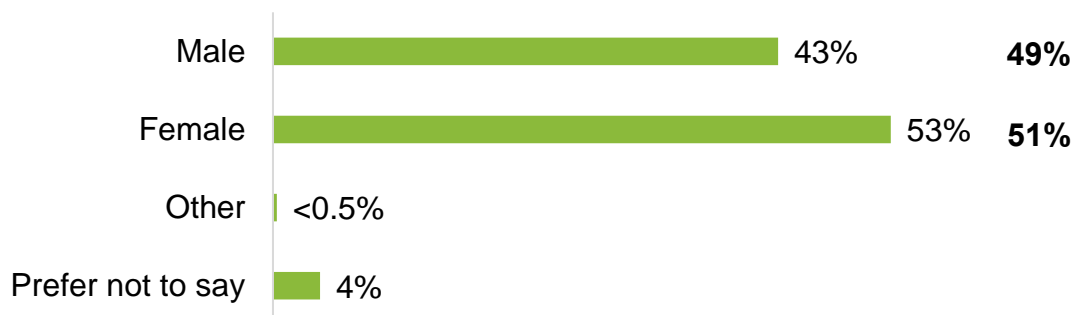
Sex

Just over 1 in 2 are female in the sample (53%), with a lower proportion (43%) identifying as male. Less than 0.5% of those answering identify in another way.

Census data for Newcastle shows that male residents are slightly underrepresented within the consultation.

Figure 3: Are you:

**Newcastle:
Census 2021**

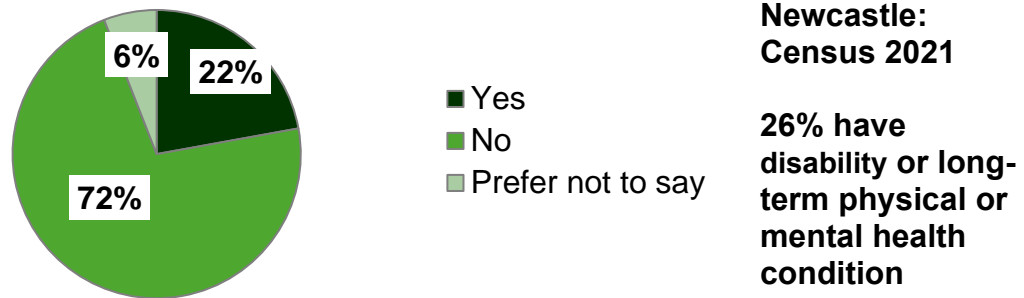


Number of respondents: (874)

Disability

Over 1 in 5 of the sample have a long-standing illness, disability or infirmity (22%).

Figure 4: Do you have any long-standing illness, disability or infirmity?



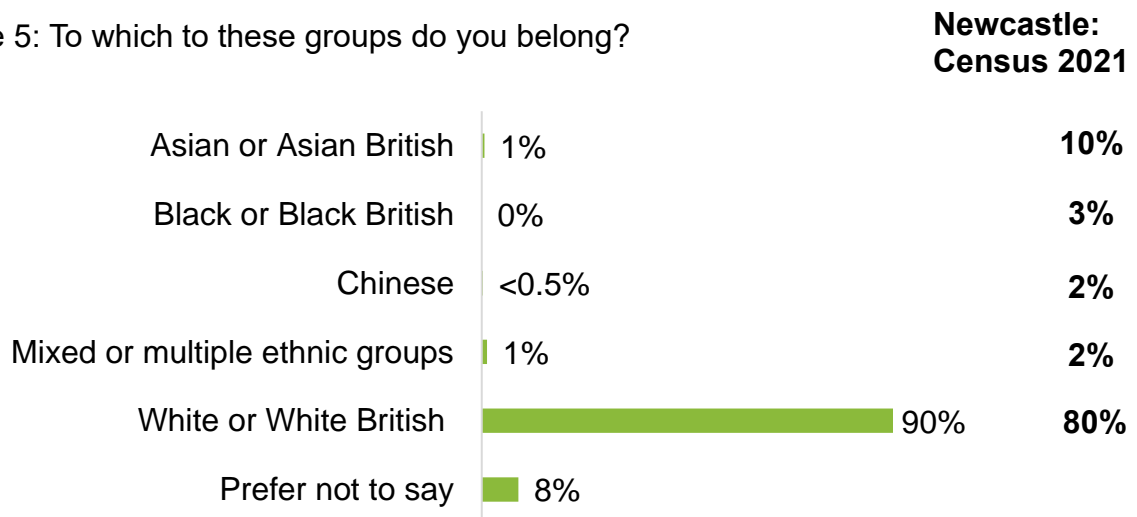
Number of respondents: (876)

Ethnicity

Most people taking part in the consultation describe themselves as White or White British (90%). Only 1 in 50 (2%) identify with a minority ethnic group.

Census data for Newcastle shows that people of Asian or Asian British ethnicity are underrepresented within the consultation.

Figure 5: To which to these groups do you belong?

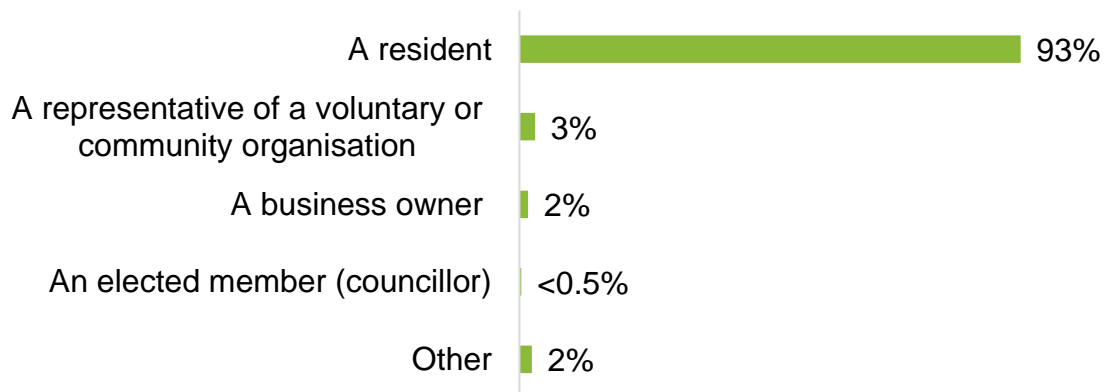


Number of respondents: (874)

Connection to the Area

Most people taking part in the consultation are Newcastle residents (93%). The others are a combination of representatives, business owners, elected members and other parties.

Figure 6: Are you:



Number of respondents: (868)

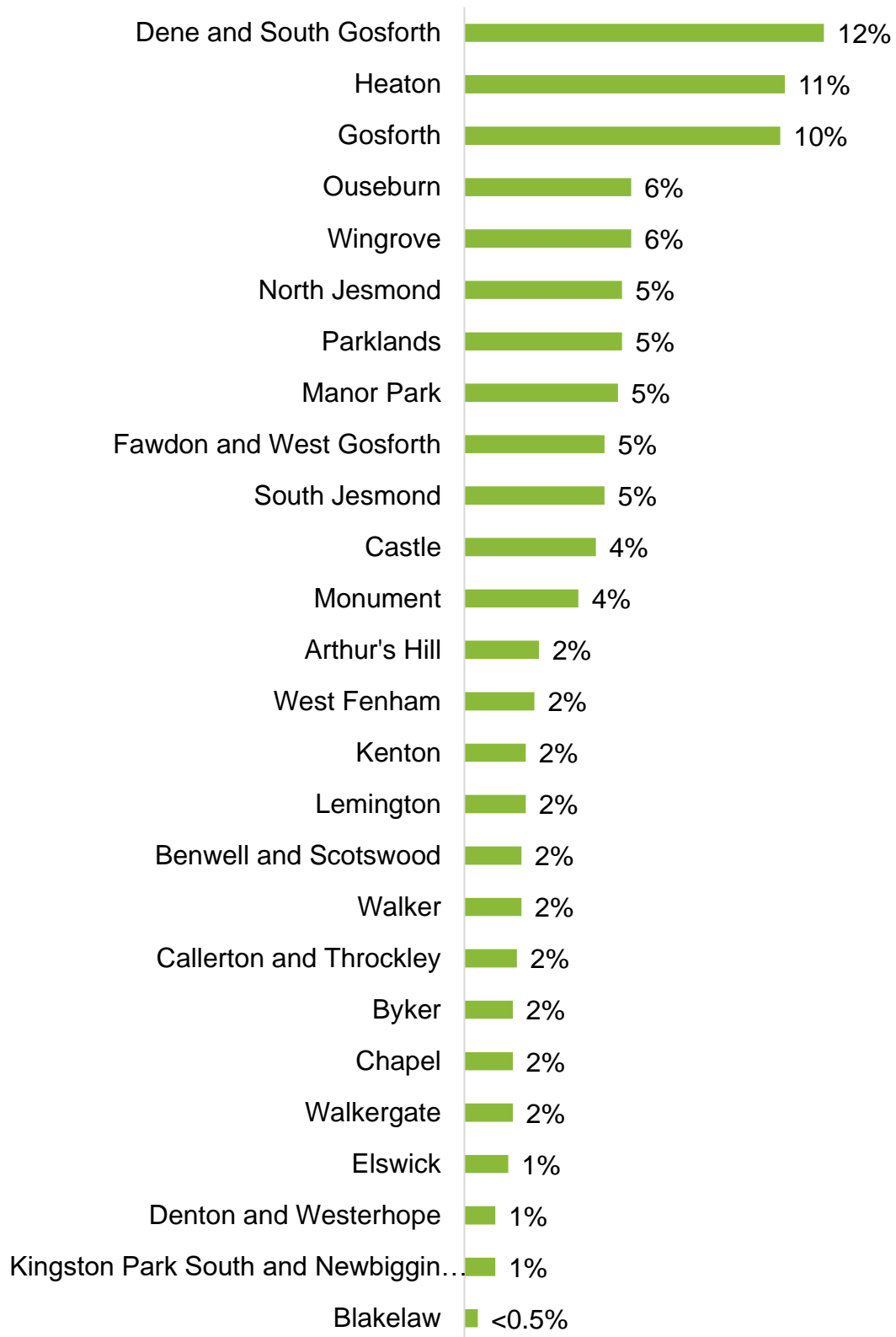
Place of Residence: Wards and Postcodes

757 respondents living within Newcastle gave their postcode.

Looking at these postcodes by Ward shows that the largest proportion - around 1 in 8 (12%) – live within Dene and South Gosforth. A further 1 in 10 (11%) live in Heaton and a similar proportion live in Gosforth (10%).

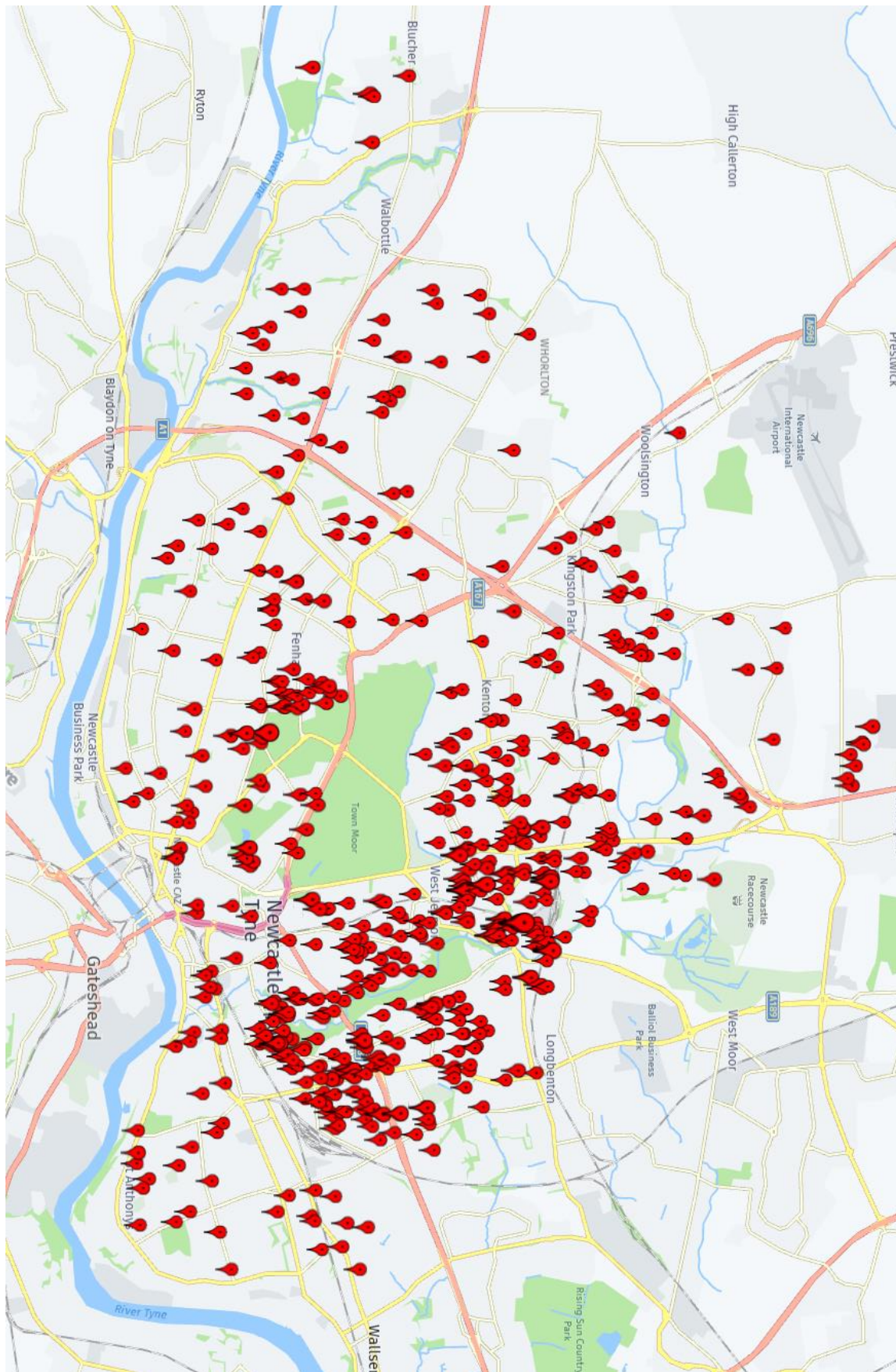
The below map (Figure 8) shows the distribution of postcodes within the Newcastle area.

Figure 7: Please tell us your postcode



Number of respondents: [757]

Figure 8: Distribution of Postcodes



Number of respondents: [757]

Parks: Engagement and Value

The consultation asked questions to find out which Newcastle parks people visit, how often they visit them and what it is they value most from their visit.

Parks Most Regularly Visited

We asked people to tell us which Newcastle park they visit most often.

The data shows Gosforth Central Park received the most mentions (17%), followed by Jesmond Dene (15%).

Exhibition Park, Leazes Park and Heaton Park were also mentioned by over 10% of the sample.

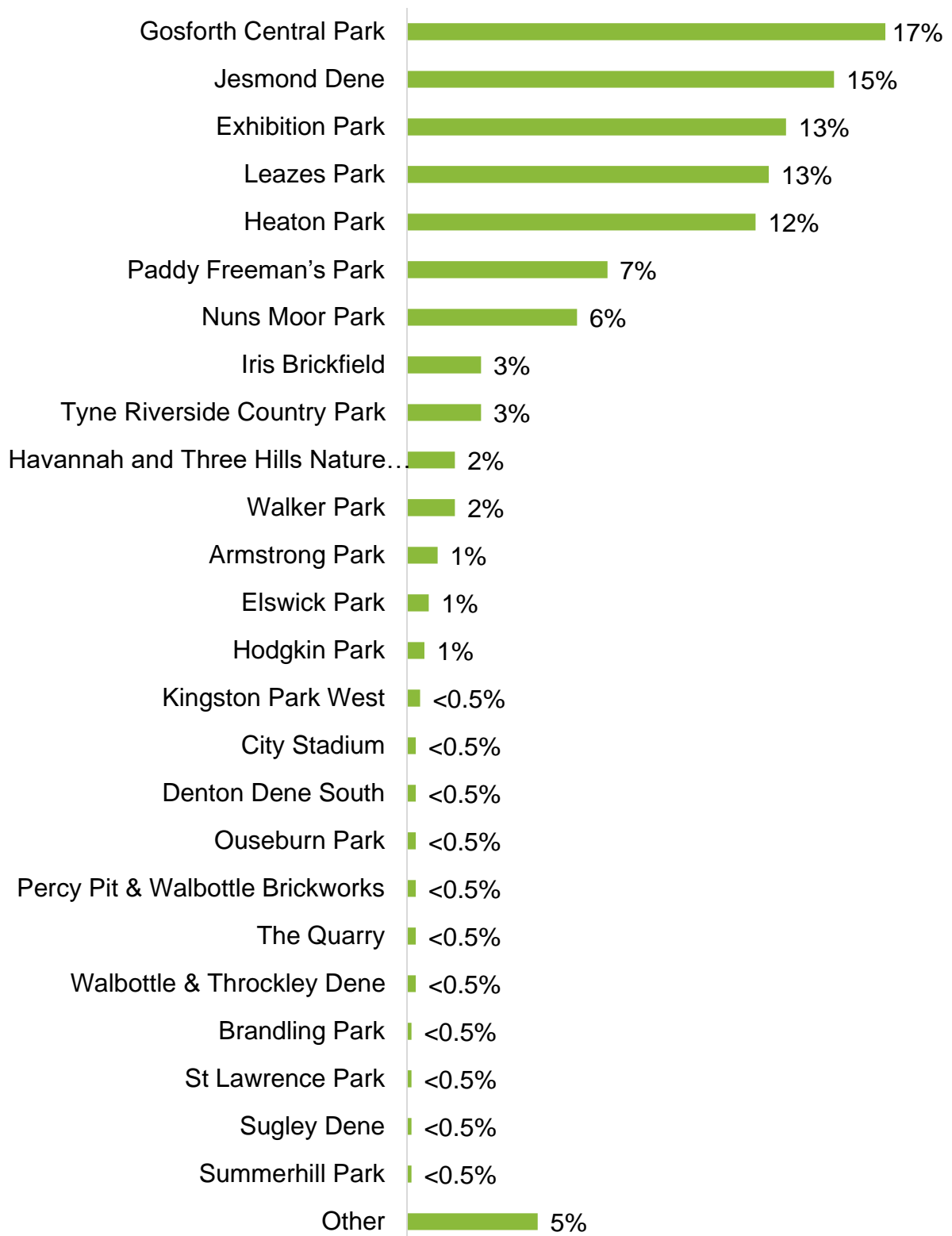
The data shows having a long-standing illness, disability or infirmity can influence which park is visited most often:

- **Gosforth Central Park** is more likely to attract those without a long-standing illness / disability (19%) than those with (10%).
- **Heaton Park** is more likely to attract those identifying with a long-standing illness / disability (18%) than those identifying without (11%).

Sex does too:

- **Leazes Park** attracts more males (16%) than females (9%).

Figure 9: Which one park in Newcastle do you visit most often?



Number of respondents: (662)

Please note: Responses labelled as 'Other' were unable to be attributed to a Newcastle park.

Figure 10: Park visited most often by long-standing illness / disability

Which one park in Newcastle do you visit most often?	Has a long-standing illness, disability or infirmity	No long-standing illness, disability or infirmity
Gosforth Central Park	10%	19%
Heaton Park	18%	11%
Number of respondents	143	473

Figure 11: Park visited most often by sex

Which one park in Newcastle do you visit most often?	Male	Female
Leazes Park	16%	9%
Number of respondents	295	338

All Parks Visited

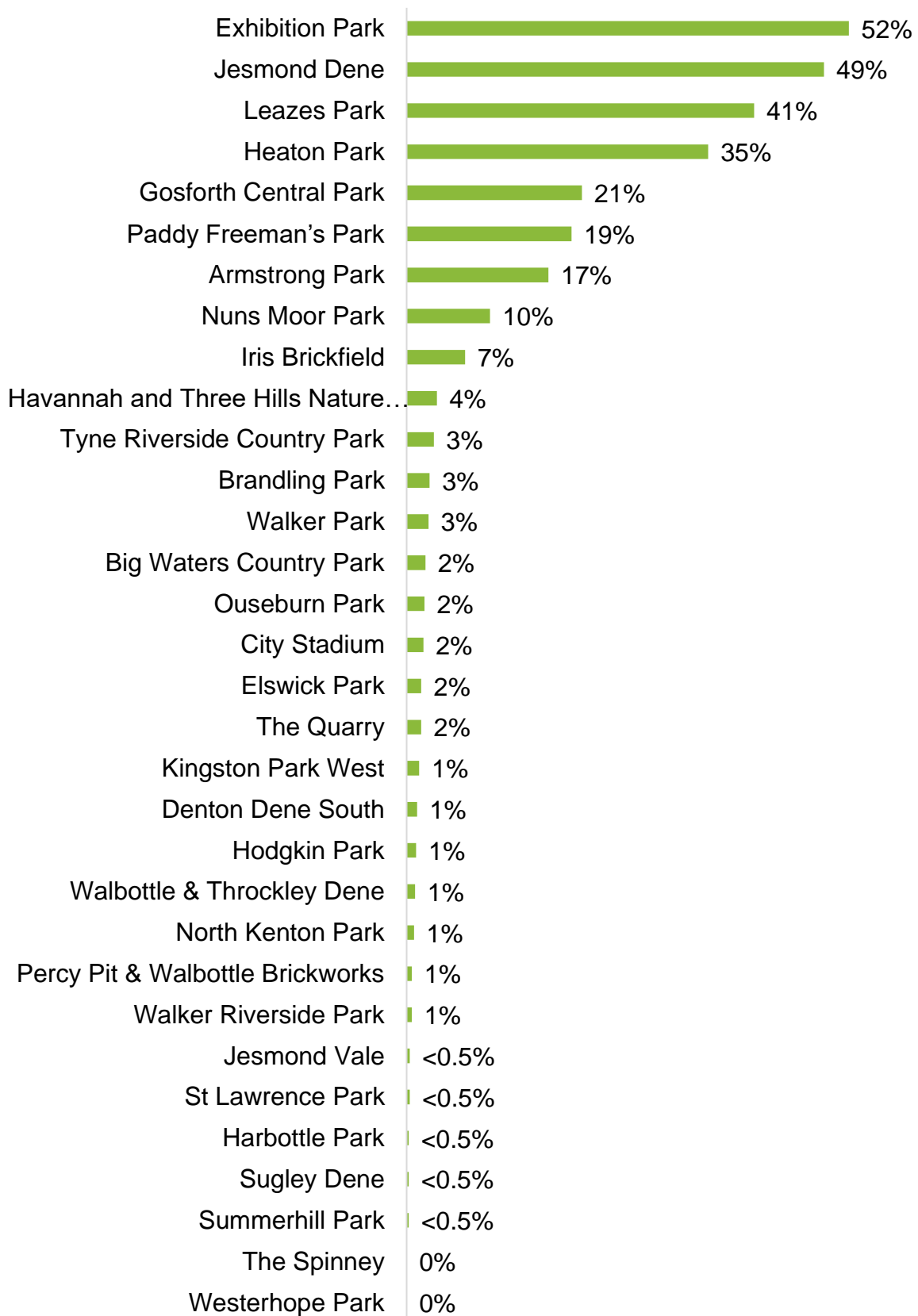
We also asked people to tell us about any other Newcastle parks they visit. This was to get an overview of which parks people visit. The following chart presents parks mentioned at either question (most visited and other parks visited).

The data shows that, overall, **Exhibition Park** (52%) and **Jesmond Dene** (49%) are the most popular Newcastle parks. **Leazes Park** (41%) and **Heaton Park** (35%) are also well-visited, as are **Gosforth Central Park** (21%), **Paddy Freeman's Park** (19%) and **Armstrong Park** (17%).

Age, disability, ethnicity and frequency of park visits can all influence which parks are visited:

- Whilst **Exhibition Park** is highly mentioned, it is significantly less likely to attract those with a long-standing illness / disability (43%) than those without (55%), and more likely to be visited by those aged 35 to 54 years (58%).
- **Gosforth Central Park** is also less likely to be visited by respondents with a long-standing illness / disability (14% vs 23% without).
- No parks in Newcastle attract more older visitors than younger visitors.
- **Iris Brickfield** receives more mentions from female respondents (9%).
- **Jesmond Dene** seems to attract higher proportions of visitors identifying as White / White British (50%) than any other ethnicities (19%).
- **Paddy Freeman's Park** presents a contrasting visitor profile (19% White / White British vs 44% other ethnicities).

Figure 12: All Newcastle parks visited



Number of respondents: (818)

Figure 13: All parks visited by age and ethnic group

Which parks in Newcastle do you visit?	18-34	35-54	55+	White / White British	Other Ethnicities
Armstrong Park	26%	18%	14%		
Exhibition Park	44%	58%	50%		
Iris Brickfield Park	12%	7%	5%		
Jesmond Dene				50%	19%
Paddy Freeman's Park	22%	24%	15%	19%	44%
Number of respondents	89	281	418	731	16

Figure 14: All parks visited by long-standing illness / disability and frequency of visiting parks

Which parks in Newcastle do you visit?	Has a long-standing illness, disability or infirmity	No long-standing illness, disability or infirmity	Visit 2+ times a week	Visit once a week or less
Armstrong Park			22%	9%
Exhibition Park	43%	55%		
Gosforth Central Park	14%	23%		
Heaton Park			43%	25%
Iris Brickfield Park			9%	3%
Jesmond Dene			57%	38%
Nuns Moor			12%	7%
Number of respondents	174	591	467	351

NB: Only statistically significant differences shown in Figure 13 and Figure 14.

Figure 15: All parks visited by sex

Which parks in Newcastle do you visit?	Male	Female
Iris Brickfield Park	5%	9%
Number of respondents	345	433

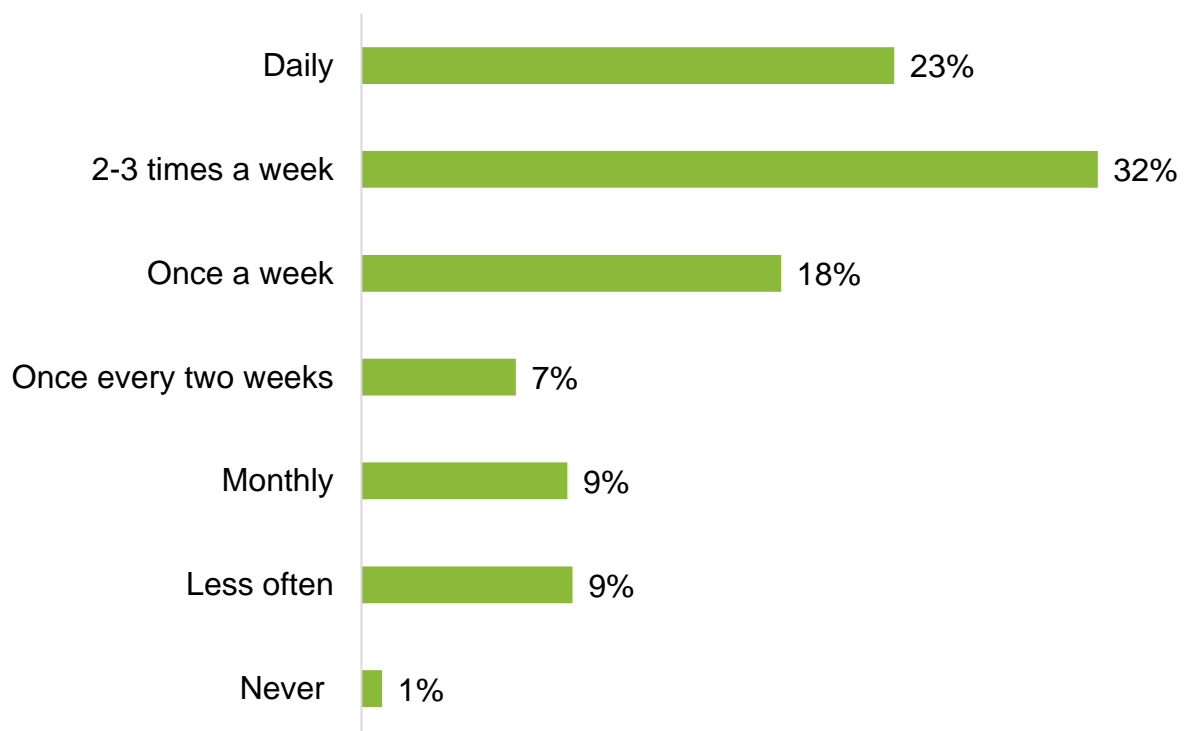
Frequency of Visiting Parks

We asked people to tell us how often they visit a Newcastle park. Answers show that most people taking part in the consultation are regular visitors, with 74% visiting once a week or more. Approaching 1 in 4 of respondents visit daily (23%).

1 in 10 respondents said that they never visit parks or do so less than monthly (10%). This increases to 15% amongst those with a disability, long-standing illness or infirmity. No significant differences are present by age, sex or ethnic group.

Those who walk / wheel to a park visit more frequently than those who travel by other means – 2 in 3 of those who walk / wheel to a park visit more than once a week (65%).

Figure 16: How often do you visit parks in Newcastle?



Number of respondents: (886)

Figure 17: Frequency of visiting parks by long-standing illness / disability

How often do you visit parks in Newcastle?	Has a long-standing illness, disability or infirmity	No long-standing illness, disability or infirmity
Less than monthly / Never	15%	8%
Number of respondents	194	630

Figure 18: Frequency of visiting parks by mode of transport used

How often do you visit parks in Newcastle?	Walking / Wheeling	Car / Van	Public Transport
More than once a week	65%	31%	14%
Number of respondents	622	146	59

Reasons for Infrequent Park Use

We asked people using a Newcastle park ‘less often’ than monthly or ‘never’ to tell us why this is.

83 respondents gave an answer and these show that a variety of barriers are at play. Personal circumstances and access can be reasons, as can negative perceptions of the parks on offer.

Some personal factors impacting the regularity of visiting parks in Newcastle include a lack of time, parks being too far away and, at times, mobility issues restricting access. The distance to parks and mobility worries often come hand-in-hand with respondents mentioning the lack of parking and welfare facilities on site at parks which would support their visit.

“I use a wheelchair and don’t live near one and cannot use public transport.”

“There is either little or no car parking facilities.”

“I don’t have time to visit.”

Already having access to a more private green space is also a common reason for not regularly visiting parks. Many mention their garden, whilst some prefer to visit their allotment in their free time.

“I have an allotment and spend most of my outdoors time there.”

“I have a garden. I think parks are great for people who don't have a garden of their own.”

Negative views about the maintenance of and personal safety within the parks were prominent amongst those rarely or never visiting as well. Common concerns link to the unkept appearance of parks including litter and weeds. Safety worries for both adults and children due to the perceived presence of drugs and anti-social behaviour in parks were also common.

“Parks in the city are run down, rat infested and a bit of an eyesore! The city centre ones only provide a haven for anti-social behaviour and unruly youths.”

“Feel unsafe due to antisocial behaviour of young people, unattractive and derelict appearance.”

“Too busy but the state of local parks are not safe for my grandchildren.”

Primary Means of Travel to Parks

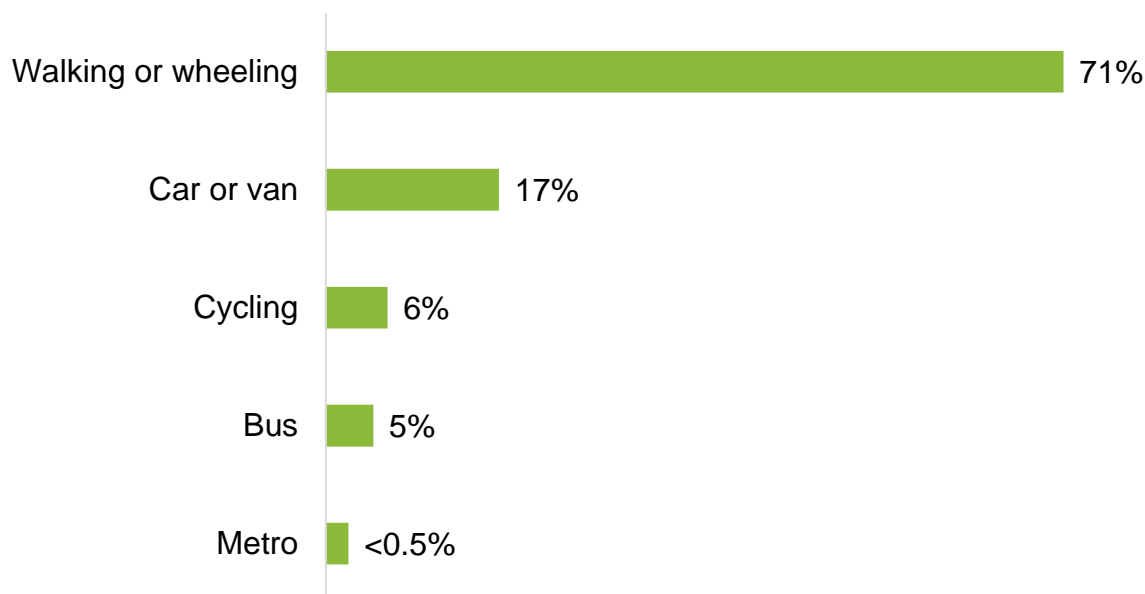
We asked people to tell us how they usually travel to parks. Answers show that walking or wheeling was most common in the sample (71%). The next most common was car or van (17%).

Few use public transport as their main mode of travel to parks (7%).

Those mainly travelling to parks by car / van or Metro are less likely to be Newcastle residents. Those walking or wheeling to parks are most likely to be visiting parks multiple times per week (82%).

Residents (73%) are more likely than non-residents (45%) to walk or wheel when travelling to parks.

Figure 19: When you visit Newcastle's parks, how do you get there? (Most common way)



Number of respondents: (879)

Figure 20: Mode of transport to parks by relationship with Newcastle and frequency of visiting

Most common means of travel to parks	Resident	Non-Resident	Visit 2+ times a week	Visit once a week or less
Walking or wheeling	73%	45%	82%	56%
Car or van	15%	28%	9%	26%
Number of respondents	803	60	490	389

Parks: Top Values

We asked people to tell us what they value most about the parks in Newcastle.

Responses show that people appreciate the Newcastle parks for a number of reasons but that factors linked to accessibility are most important. For example, 'access to green space' topped the list of things people value most about Newcastle's parks, selected by approaching 3 in 4 (73%). This was followed by nearly 1 in 2 (47%) saying that it is important to them that the parks 'are free for everyone to use'.

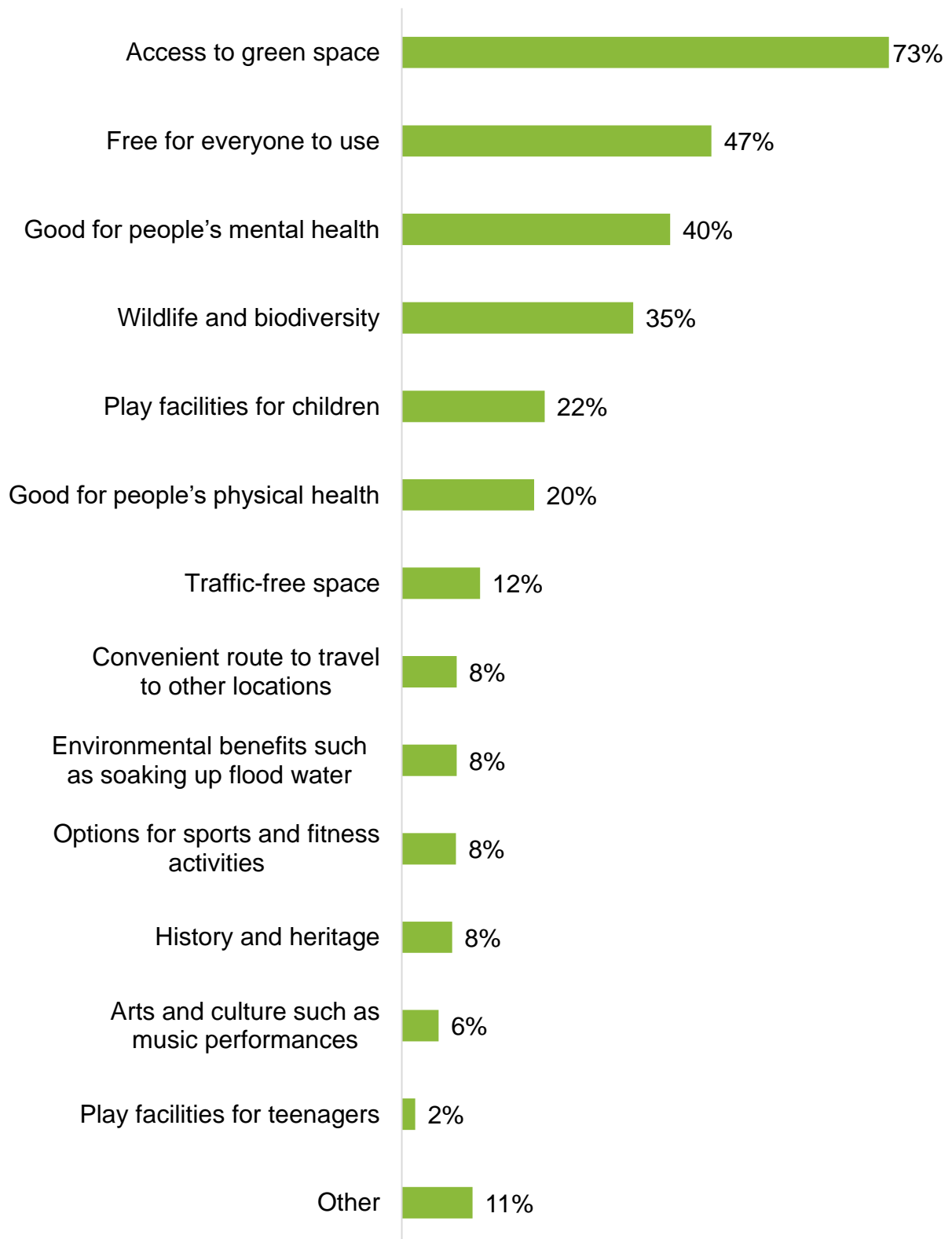
Feedback also tells us that parks are seen to have a vital role in people's health and wellbeing. 'Good for people's mental health' was selected as most important by 2 in 5 respondents (40%) and 1 in 5 (20%) selected 'good for people's physical health'.

Over 1 in 3 (35%) value the parks for their wildlife and biodiversity. Play facilities are also well-valued but for children (22%) rather than for teenagers (2%).

Demographics can shape what people value about our parks:

- Access to green space is more highly valued by those visiting parks multiple times per week (79%) than less frequent users (66%).
- Parks being free for everyone to use is valued more by females (53%) than males (41%).
- Parks as important for mental health is valued more highly by those with a long-standing illness or disability (48%) compared to those without (39%).
- Wildlife and biodiversity is significantly more important to frequent visitors (41%) than less frequent visitors (27%).
- Play facilities for children are more important to females (26%) than males (17%) and those visiting parks once a week or less (26%) compared to more frequent visitors (18%).

Figure 21: What do you value most about Newcastle's parks? Please tick up to three options



Number of respondents: (882)

Figure 22: What people value about parks – how often they visit and whether they have an allotment

What people value most about parks in Newcastle	Visit 2+ times a week	Visit once a week or less	Have an Allotment	No Allotment
Access to green space	79%	66%		
Wildlife and biodiversity	41%	27%	44%	32%
Play facilities for children	18%	26%		
Number of respondents	493	389	188	683

Figure 23: Value by sex and long-standing illness / disability

What people value most about parks in Newcastle	Male	Female	Has a long-standing illness, disability or infirmity	No long-standing illness, disability or infirmity
Free for everyone to use	41%	53%		
Good for mental health			48%	39%
Play facilities for children	17%	26%		
Number of respondents	373	460	193	629

NB: Only statistically significant differences shown in Figure 22 and 23.

Allotments: Engagement and Value

The consultation asked questions to find out if people had an allotment and what they value about them.

Allotment Tenancy

Results suggest that 1 in 5 taking part in this consultation survey currently have an allotment (22%).

Those with an allotment are significantly more likely to be aged over 55. Those who have no associations with allotments are more likely to be younger than 35.

There were, however, no significant differences in whether or not people have an allotment by sex, disability or ethnic group.

Figure 24: Do you have an allotment?

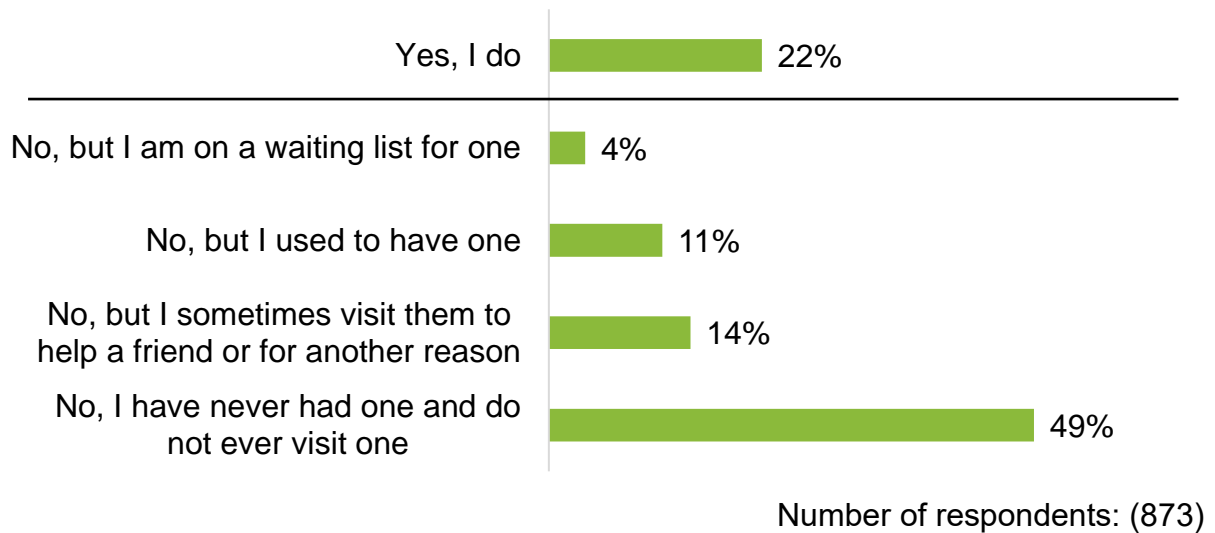


Figure 25: Whether people have an allotment, by age

Allotments	18-34	35-54	55+
Access to allotment	16%	18%	25%
No involvement with any allotment	61%	50%	47%
Number of respondents	95	306	437

People who said that they have an allotment were asked to name where this was. The allotment mentioned most was Beaumont Terrace Allotments (8%), followed by Ridgewood Crescent Allotments (5%).

Please note: Responses labelled as 'Other' were unable to be attributed to a Newcastle-based allotment. It is possible that these respondents may be using allotments not currently managed by UGN.

Figure 26: Location of allotment

Beaumont Terrace Allotment Association	8%
Ridgewood Crescent Allotment Association	5%
Armstrong Allotment Association	4%
Rectory Road Allotment Association	4%
High West Jesmond Allotment Association	3%
School House Allotment Association	3%
Stotes Hall Allotment Association	3%
Premier Allotment Association	3%
St Gabriels Allotment Association	3%
Hazlerigg Allotment Association	2%
Greenwater Pool Allotment Association	2%
Iris Brickfield Allotment Association	2%
Stephen Street Allotment Association	2%
Three Mile Allotment Association	2%
City Stadium Allotments Association	1%
Denton Bank Allotment Association	1%
Duxfield West Allotment Association	1%
Fairways Allotment Association	1%
Newbiggin Hall Allotment Association	1%
Walkergate Allotment Association	1%
Walkergate Hospital Allotment Association	1%
Woodbine Terrace Allotment Association	1%
BCT (Burnopfield, Castleside & Tantobie) Allotment Association	1%
Blayney Row Allotment Association	1%
Gloucester Road Allotment Association	1%
High Heaton Allotment Association Committee	1%
Thropton Terrace	1%
Tweed Street Allotment Association	1%
West Denton Allotment Association	1%
Whinneyfield Road Allotment Association	1%
Woodlea Gardens Allotment Association	1%
Other	40%

Number of respondents: (184)

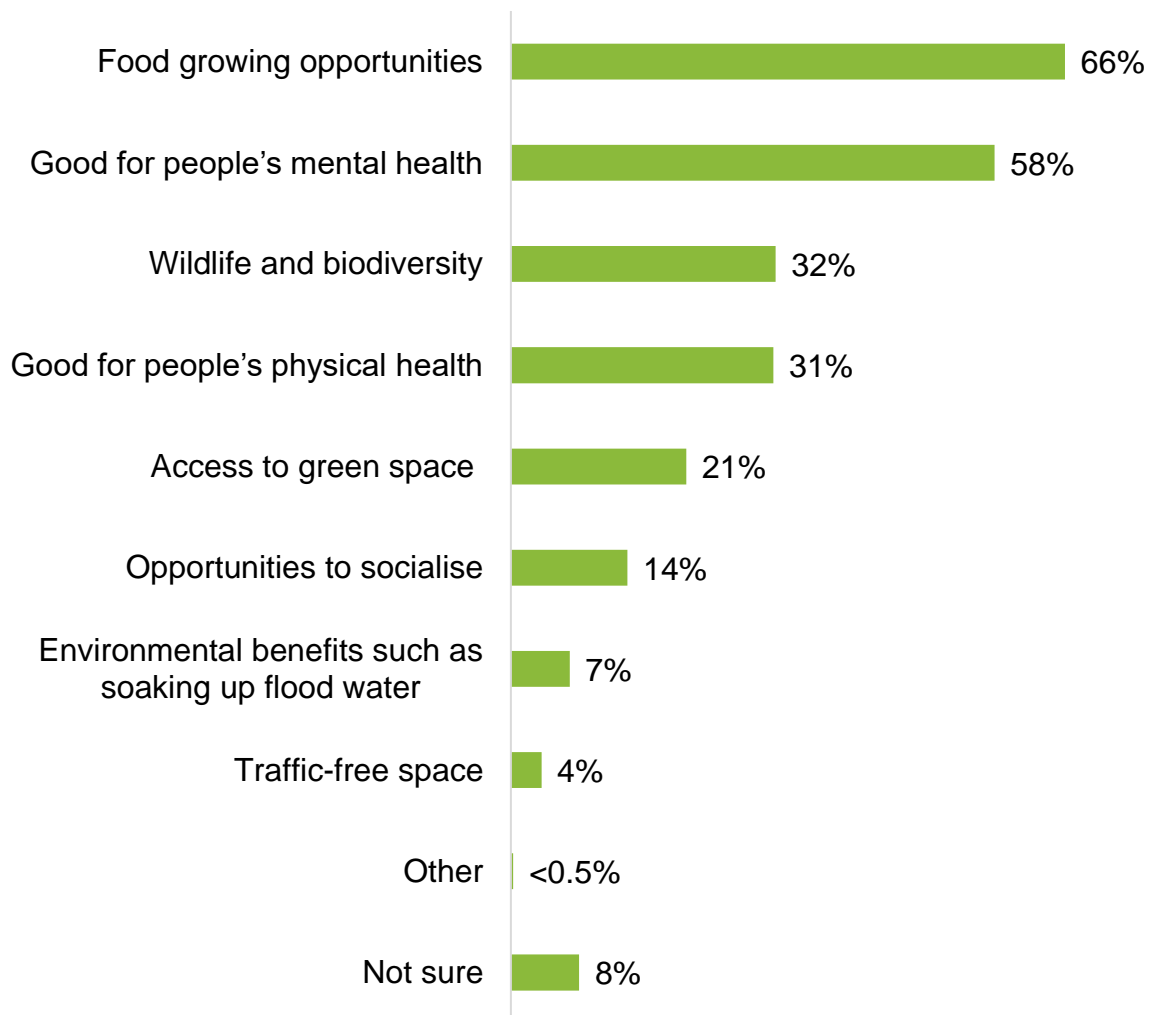
Allotments: Top Values

Allotments are valued most for the opportunities they provide for growing food (66%). They are also highly valued as being good for people's mental health (58%).

Almost 1 in 3 (32%) also value the benefits of allotments on wildlife and biodiversity and people's physical health (31%).

Respondents who particularly value food growing opportunities and the access to green space are significantly more likely to already have an allotment. Females are more likely than males to put value on wildlife and biodiversity in relation to allotments (36%), whereas males are more likely than females to focus on the physical health benefits (37%).

Figure 27: What do you value most about Newcastle's allotments? Please tick up to 3 options



Number of respondents: (710)

Figure 28: What people value about allotments, compared to whether or not they have an allotment and sex

What people value most about allotments in Newcastle	Allotment Patronage	No Allotment	Male	Female
Food growing opportunities	77%	62%		
Wildlife and biodiversity			28%	36%
Good for physical health			37%	28%
Access to green space	29%	18%		
Environmental benefits	3%	8%		
Number of respondents	185	525	298	377

NB: Only statistically significant differences shown in Figure 28

Future Priorities

We asked people to tell us what they feel should be prioritised for the management of parks, allotments and green spaces in Newcastle. Overall, 837 respondents provided comments.

Parks and Green Spaces: Future Priorities

Throughout comments, there is a general dissatisfaction with the management of parks and green spaces across Newcastle over recent years, with specific references made to Urban Green.

Across all visitor profiles, there is agreement that big changes are needed to restore these valuable spaces to their former glory. The key themes apparent span four overarching categories:

- Increased accessibility for all
- Improvement of safety and security
- Improvement of general upkeep and cleaning
- Improvement of biodiversity

There is little variation in top priorities for management between frequent and infrequent users.

Increased Accessibility For All

There is a general consensus that parks should be free and easy to use for all. However, many feel that some parks are currently excluding some visitors due to their lack of accessible paths and lack of welfare facilities.

Visitors using wheelchairs or buggies, in particular, often struggle with the uneven paths present in many parks across the city. Some visitors feel they cannot visit some spaces or access the whole area.

“Maintaining pathways so they are accessible for mobility scooters and buggies etc. and maintaining places to sit - especially places which are partly sheltered so people can still sit in the colder / wetter months.”

“Make them disabled friendly by re-doing pathways where trees have made them uneven.”

Many respondents also call for the maintenance and restoration of the children’s play areas and sport facilities to continue to bring in the younger audience. This priority does, however, tie into safety concerns as some families currently feel some parks are not safe for their children.

“Get more activities for children of all ages in parks.”

A final recurring priority for accessibility, again, is investment in welfare facilities, to help a broader range of people to enjoy the parks at leisure. Feedback suggests this would be valued by families and elderly visitors who often think about availability of toilet facilities and seating when deciding where to visit.

For parks which currently have welfare facilities, there are suggestions that they would benefit from more regular cleaning and upkeep, as well as extended and regular opening times.

“I would like to see more toilet facilities in parks so that people can spend longer periods of time there. There are some in Nuns Moor Park but no-one has access to them.”

“Walker Park, my local, is well used, but the small cafe run by the YMCA has been discontinued, and is greatly missed, particularly by old people, and by young families with children. As an old person suffering with IBS, the loss of the toilets (when the cafe closed) has inhibited my ability to socialise with others, as there are no other toilets anywhere else locally.”

Jesmond Dene and **Gosforth Central Park** are two green spaces which received specific mentions with these concerns. Respondents feel that priorities should involve the restoration and upkeep of flooring / paths which are viewed to be dangerous – particularly for children and older visitors. At **Gosforth Central Park** there is also widespread interest in the restoration of the leisure and play facilities, to make sure that it continues to service all of its users.

“Too much of Jesmond Dene is inaccessible due to poor maintenance, closed pathways and bridges.”

“For Gosforth Central Park, I push my mother in her wheelchair and the condition of the path is deteriorating which makes it very hard to navigate.”

“Gosforth Central Park is a busy hub used by a wide variety of ages. Facilities for older and younger children need improvement, basketball courts updating, play equipment updating. The huts along the tennis courts could be put to good use. It’s a lovely park with a lovely atmosphere, let’s keep it that way.”

Improvements in Safety and Security

For many, the parks in Newcastle require fresh security measures, to tackle ill-behaviour in these spaces.

Respondents often discuss feeling unsafe in parks, during the day and at night. This prevents many from visiting as often as they would like. This is an overarching concern, for both families and adult-only visitors.

The introduction of better lighting and monitored security cameras is mentioned as a way of preventing anti-social behaviour and vandalism. Other methods suggested to support safety and security include locking parks overnight, having a volunteer or staff presence in parks and taking harsher measures to tackle crime.

“Finding ways to stop vandalism and making it more pleasant for people to frequent maybe by having a presence i.e. park keepers. If parks are seen to be cared for maybe people might think twice about destroying them.”

“Maybe start by investing in secure fencing and gates that will be locked at a certain time each day. This will not only help to secure the park from vandalism and crime but also reduce future running costs by reducing the amount of future upkeep caused by this.”

“Tackle anti-social behaviour in parks properly by really putting pressure on police to act.”

Feedback suggests that **Nuns Moor Park** would benefit from more security measures – particularly at night when anti-social behaviour is felt to spike. Suggestions involve CCTV or night patrols.

“Increased night patrol, or security cameras would be beneficial as people gather near the playground gazebo and cause trouble.”

Greater restrictions around vehicle access within **Exhibition Park** was also suggested in the context of improving safety and security.

“Get the cars and taxis out of Exhibition Park! They are so dangerous.”

The call for better lighting does not only play a role in increasing safety due to anti-social behaviour, but also for more general reasons. Some respondents feel the poor lighting combined with uneven paving is a trip hazard. **Gosforth Central Park** is one area that is mentioned for this issue of lighting and uneven walkways.

“I’m frightened to walk through Gosforth Central Park at nighttime in case I trip, the lighting is appalling.”

Improvements in General Upkeep

Feedback also suggests that the improvement of the general upkeep – tree maintenance, weeding, regular grass cutting - is a dominant priority for many visitors. Many feel this form of regular maintenance is currently neglected, resulting in parks which look ‘shabby’ and ‘ignored’.

Allowing volunteers to work alongside park rangers to support the general upkeep of local parks is suggested as a way of delivering improved upkeep in an economical way. At present, many feel there are not enough staff on the ground in parks, and perhaps in comparison, too many higher up in management.

Comments also suggest that maintaining an improved general upkeep, alongside restoring children’s play areas, has potential to restore community pride and, in turn, deter a large majority of the anti-social behaviour and vandalism currently occurring.

“Encourage local people to volunteer to look after these spaces. If they want to keep them then they need to contribute.”

“Make them nice places to visit. Take care of them better - add flowers, cafes and toilets. Take care of all these wildflower areas which due to lack of care have turned into scrubland. Use the unemployed to work on the gardens one day a week to qualify for their benefits. Take back pride in our city.”

“The priorities should be to maintain what we have effectively. This can be done quite simply by keeping footpaths weed free and the grassed areas cut regularly. Generating a volunteer program for this work could be financially beneficial to the authority.”

“Urban Green is a good idea, but they have been too ‘policy’ driven with too many managers and not enough staff on the ground i.e. in the parks etc. They need to work more closely with local volunteers and ‘friends’ groups - they can’t do it all themselves, or control everything themselves and even if they could it would not be in the parks long-term best interests.”

Another recurring priority revolves around the cleanliness of parks. Comments suggest that litter is a key issue in many parks – largely believed to be due to the lack of waste bins available.

Increasing the number of secure bins which cannot be removed or damaged would be the solution for some visitors.

Further suggestions to tackle any remaining litter involves the use of volunteers and rangers. Similar to previous comments, it is mentioned that volunteers are not currently used enough, and that organised litter picking groups would willingly contribute towards the upkeep of parks by these means.

“There should be more secure bins provided - properly secured so the wheelie bin cannot be removed by a pair of bolt cutters and then burnt. Litter is dropped because there are no bins, but there are no bins because they get torched. Litter is not only unsightly it has a detrimental impact on local wildlife and ultimately ends up in the river and then the sea.”

“Increased use of volunteers. Organise groups to litter pick and increase awareness of everyone’s contribution.”

Walker Park and **Leazes Park** received some specific mentions as respondents yearned for the way the parks used to be. They would like them returned their former state.

“I’ve not been to Walker Park in over 20 years it was beautiful back then. I used to take the kids to play there when we went to visit my mam, it’s so sad.”

“Went through Leazes Park the other day and I was shocked - it is a disgrace. I used to spend hours in there a few years ago when my son was young, he was shocked too. I definitely wouldn’t go through on my own now either.”

Tackling litter and overfilled bins, in turn, is felt to be an initial means of supporting the necessity of pest control in the parks. Many respondents discuss the rats they see around children's play areas and around bins in various parks in the city. The issue is such that many individuals say they no longer visit these parks and that, as a result, feel their children are at a disadvantage due to a lack of outdoor play.

“Firstly, eradicating the rats must be a priority.”

“Keep clean to minimise infestation of rats which seem to be growing. Ensure bins are emptied regularly, often see these overflowing which encourage more rats.”

Gosforth Park and **Leazes Park**, in particular, are highlighted as having a concerning pest problem. There is high interest in tackling this, so visitors can resume their regular visits which they valued before. This feeling is apparent for families worried about their children playing in areas where rats are roaming, as well as adult visitors.

“Gosforth Park is my closest, but I rarely go here as every time I've been there's rats in the children's play area. It's not nice to see them scurrying around as my toddlers play.”

“I used to attend weekly art classes in Leazes Park and these are vital to foster community, health, connection and fun. I will happily return after the rats disappear.”

Another recurring viewpoint to improve the maintenance of parks and green spaces across Newcastle is the restoration of disused buildings in parks. Finding new uses for derelict buildings is a persistent priority for those visiting **Jesmond Dene**, with concerns voiced around the area looking 'scruffy'.

“Even Jesmond Dene is a mess now and seems unloved - it is losing its appeal. It has two dilapidated buildings, and it just looks scruffy.”

Improvements in Biodiversity

Despite all visitor profiles indicating some interest, frequent visitors to parks across Newcastle (visiting more than once a week) show most interest in the improvement of biodiversity in our local parks.

A considerable proportion of people state the importance of the natural environment with suggestions to encourage and sustain habitats for wildlife such as hedgehogs and birds. Others highlight the importance of having long grass and wildflowers in some areas to benefit the natural surroundings.

Some respondents also discuss difficulties reaching out to Urban Green when they have concerns about wildlife – subsequently feeling there is a lack of care.

“The biodiversity of wildlife, flora and fauna must be protected and encouraged over commercial concerns. Dealing with flooding and climate change should be paramount too.”

“Your next strategy should focus on returning parks to the state and the usage they should have as green spaces for a mainly urban community to relax and enjoy biodiversity.”

“Ensure that whatever contractual framework they sit under ensures standards are maintained or improved from a biodiversity perspective.”

“Maintain the parks but leave wild areas where biodiversity can happen. Engage the community with the reason for wild areas. Encourage hedgehogs, squirrels, birds etc. by engaging the community in box making and add trail cams in key areas where the community can check in online. Include owl boxes and bat boxes.”

“I would like to see more care of the swans and ducks at Leazes Park, they often look neglected and the water looks very dirty and sometimes oily. I know people who have reported it, but everyone finds it hard to communicate with Urban green – they often can't be reached.”

Priorities for improving the biodiversity at **Havannah Nature Reserve** resonated amongst some respondents with worries that the current fencing is killing the wildlife. Visitors are desperate to see the removal of these in order to revive the nature that they feel is being compromised at present.

“Havannah is a joke. It's all sectioned off and killing the wildlife. 20 years ago it was teeming with life. Now it's just a prison of fencing and wire. Rip down the fences, let the wildlife roam. This is a nature reserve first and foremost.”

Allotments: Future Priorities

Whilst the priorities of those with allotments does largely align with those discussed, comments suggest that they place a larger value on the improvement of biodiversity in parks and green spaces. Feedback suggests this maintenance could take the form of supporting the introduction of new habitats like hedgehogs and bees to parks, educating visitors to mitigate damaging behaviours, and maintaining trees and planting in a safe way.

“Encouraging and providing resources for wildlife including bees and hedgehogs.”

“Educating people on wildlife so as their behaviour doesn’t have a negative impact on the environment.”

“Focus on better managing the quality of the trees and planting and grounds.”

“Good management to maintain character, attractiveness and wildlife habitats.”

Allotment users have a more dedicated view for the specific maintenance of Newcastle’s allotments.

It is clear from these individuals that allotments are imperative, with many using them as a means of supporting both their physical and mental health, as well as for an opportunity to be outside when they otherwise would not be. As a result, it is a priority for many that allotments are a safe and secure place, free from worry – from both people and unwanted pests i.e. rats.

“It is important that the parks and allotments should be secure and clean as they are the pillars of people’s mental health and wildlife. When I go to both of those it’s important I will relax and feel in touch with the nature and I don’t have to worry I will be in any danger or feel it’s neglected with rubbish everywhere.”

“Investing in security of allotment spaces to keep them safe and helping to reduce pest populations.”

Other recurring themes involve the wish to make sure allotments are accessible to all by keeping costs low but also introducing more allotment spaces to meet demand.

“More allotments should be created as waiting lists are long.”

“Keeping allotments affordable for everyone.”

“Giving as much power to the allotment holders as possible, keeping costs low to enable everyone the opportunity to join, need more in the Great Park area.”

There is some concern amongst allotment users that they and wider allotment associations have been sidelined under the management of Urban Green and the priority has been on parks and green spaces. Allotment users feel that they need more support, active engagement and communication from management. One respondent provided specific examples of support that could be involved in this process.

“The allotments have been sidelined by Urban Green, possibly due to their prioritisation of parks. As a secretary of our allotment site, I would like the allotments management to be carried out by an organisation that does genuinely care and are willing to engage meaningfully with all allotment associations and their tenants. The prioritisation of parks and green spaces has had a negative outcome for allotment holders who work with nature to grow food for themselves and share with the wider community. Urban Green have let us down, badly.”

“Communication is poor, there is confusion over who is responsible for what and there is much cynicism amongst allotment holders as to the allotments' priority in the list of Urban Green's responsibilities. This creates a reluctance for people to step up and volunteer.”

“I think Urban Green need to give more support to allotments in general. Here are a few useful areas that could be improved:

- resources to gardeners on how to collect their own water**
- educate gardeners on wildlife / biodiversity friendly practices and why it is important**
- overhaul how some allotment sites are run as some people seemingly use their plots as dumping grounds”**