

APRIL 2016

# What's next for: West Pilton Park?



This report describes the consultation process, findings and subsequent proposals for West Pilton Park carried out in 2015.

A stylized, light green graphic of a tree with a trunk and several branches, each ending in a cluster of leaves. The leaves are represented by simple, rounded shapes with internal vein-like patterns. The tree is positioned on the left side of the page, extending from the bottom to the top.

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# Executive Summary

Over the summer of 2015 development workers from Pilton Community Health Project worked with residents and partner organisations to carry out a consultation about the future of West Pilton Park. 152 people were consulted at 6 events on and around the Park and through door to door consultation.

## Residents told us

- They wanted the Park to be a safe, welcoming space. They were concerned about the woodland areas and wanted more activities for young people.
- Rubbish accumulates on the Park and there is some fly tipping. Some dog owners do not clean up after their pets. More bins with better signage would help.
- Families with small children often use the Park. The play equipment is in poor condition and the positions of the play areas make it difficult to supervise children of different ages.
- Dog walkers use the Park a lot and would welcome regular dog events. There is concern about unruly dogs and dog mess not being cleared up.
- Older people are unlikely to use the Park. Benches, picnic tables and events targeting older people would help.

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## Key features residents would like to see on the Park

- Natural play equipment
- More activities e.g. Tai Chi, fitness sessions, fun days and sports
- Structures and features that embrace the urban nature of the Park

Following the consultation Edinburgh and Lothian Greenspace Trust drew up proposals for the improvement of West Pilton Park. Details of these are included later in this report.

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## Pilton Community Health Project recommendations

- Support to West Pilton Park Action Group to
  - a) constitute as a Friends of the Park group
  - b) deliver activities on the Park
- Be involved in the ongoing development of the Park with the City of Edinburgh Council and others
- Local organisational partners to develop a plan to increase use of the Park e.g. sports and play sessions
- Owners and other stakeholders in the Park develop a strategy to implement improvement proposals

Pilton Community Health Project will continue to work with partners and residents to drive forward the implementation of the improvement plan.

## Background to West Pilton Park Improvement Project

In 2013, a review was carried out by Pilton Community Health Project (PCHP) Development Workers on physical activity participation in North Edinburgh (Moving Forwards, 2013<sup>1</sup>). This revealed specific issues impacting on the use of green spaces the area and West Pilton Park was the focus of many comments made by local people. These mainly related to negative perceptions of the Park as being unsafe, dirty and not considered an attractive area for participating in physical activity. The review recommended increasing the number of local people using the Park for activities to improve public perceptions of it and thus, help address some of the issues.

West Pilton Park is owned and maintained by The City of Edinburgh Council. It is spread across two levels and includes: a large grassy open space, three children's play areas, three small woodland areas and a sculpture of a footprint. West Pilton Neighbourhood Centre is responsible for an all-weather pitch at the North East edge of the Park. From 2013, the Park had increasing issues with anti-social behaviour which impacted on local perceptions of the Park, particularly around safety. '#StrongerNorth', a multi-agency initiative, was set up to tackle criminality, anti-social behaviour and deal with other local issues.

This improvement project fitted well with the aims of PCHP and its work around increasing physical activity participation in North Edinburgh. It also correlates with local and citywide key strategic aims, including those of the Health Inequalities Standing Group<sup>2</sup> (HISG) and the Forth Neighbourhood Partnership<sup>3</sup> (FNP). Subsequently, the FNP contributed funds that assisted us to carry out a more detailed consultation about the Park and commission the development of improvement proposals.



<sup>1</sup>[www.pchp.org.uk/resources/moving-forward](http://www.pchp.org.uk/resources/moving-forward)

<sup>2</sup>[www.edinburgh.gov.uk/info/20215/adult\\_social\\_care\\_and\\_support/821/health\\_and\\_social\\_strategy](http://www.edinburgh.gov.uk/info/20215/adult_social_care_and_support/821/health_and_social_strategy)

<sup>3</sup>[www.edinburghnp.org.uk/forth](http://www.edinburghnp.org.uk/forth)



## STRATEGIC AIMS

### Pilton Community Health Project (PCHP)

#### Aim:

'To work towards creating a healthy community in North Edinburgh by improving the physical, mental and social health and wellbeing of local people using a community de-velopment approach' (PCHP Action Plan 2014)

### Health Inequalities Standing Group (HISG)

#### Outcomes:

- More people live in healthy environments and use greenspace
- Increased participation in physical activity: including walking, cycling, dance, active travel and gardening

### Forth Neighbourhood Partnership Local Community Plan 2014-17

#### Priority:

- Increase Opportunities for all to live healthy lifestyles

### West Pilton Park Improvement Project

#### Aims:

- To increase use of West Pilton Park for physical activity
- To enhance the park environment
- To improve people's perceptions about West Pilton Park
- To support local residents to start a Friends of the Park

# The approach

We recognised early on that a multi-agency approach would increase the chances of this project being successful. In response, we facilitated four initial partnership meetings to establish working relationships and clarify the role of the different agencies. Some were involved in the delivery of event activities while others had a more strategic role. Support from the FNP enabled us to commission the expertise of Edinburgh Lothian Greenspace Trust (ELGT). As well as providing us with invaluable consultation advice, they also analysed the findings and drafted the Park Improvement Proposals.

The importance of involving local people in the process was a key aspect of the consultation. As a result, the development of the West Pilton Park Action Group (WPPAG) occurred early on with the intention that this would eventually become an official 'Friends of the Park' group. Having a constituted group of enthusiastic local people keen to see the Park improved would open up funding possibilities and increase community ownership. Initial membership to WPPAG was established through local partners involved in the project. Some members assisted in the planning and delivery of events as well as helping to consult those who attended.

Over a period of six months PCHP worked with members of the community and eleven local partners to develop deliver and consult at a series of events on and around the Park. Additional consultation took place through some door-to-door surveying in the local area. The main aims of the consultation were to discover how people felt about the Park, gain some information about its history and usage and get people thinking about what kind place they would like West Pilton Park to be.

Each event was intended to attract a different demographic to the Park, enabling us to talk with a wide range of people whilst they engaged in positive activities. This encouraged them to envisage how the Park could be used to its best potential, rather than focusing on negative aspects. The questions and images used were carefully designed to get people thinking about how the Park should feel, rather than focusing on what structures they would like to see on it. This would help us to avoid raising individual expectations and ensure we provided ELGT with information they could translate into achievable and realistic plans. Essentially, we needed a generalised view of how people envisaged the Park, rather than a long unrealistic wish list of what people wanted.



# The Consultation

Approximately **230 people attended four consultation events** on the park, of those;

**40 parents** were consulted at a 'Teddy Bears Picnic' that included ball games, arts and crafts and face painting activities. Around 100 local parents with young children attended the event that was organised in partnership with the North Edinburgh Timebank and North Edinburgh Arts Centre.

**25 young people** were consulted at that 'Sporty event' that included a cycling assault course, boxing training and football. Around 30 young people from the local area took part in the event which was delivered in partnership with MYAdventure, KABO Boxing Academy and The Spartans Community Football Academy.

**25 older adults** consulted at a 'Tea in the Park' event; delivered in partnership with West Pilton Neighbourhood Centre (WPNC), The Prentice Centre and Pilton Equalities Project (PEP). Around 50 older adults from the local area attended the event and took part in activities including Line Dancing and Tai Chi.

**30 local dog owners** consulted at a 'Bark in the Park' dog agility event. Activities were delivered by local dog training clubs. The event was very popular with around 50 dog owners (and their dogs) taking part in agility training and taking advantage of having expert advice on hand.

Additional consultation;

**10 people consulted at PEP's Community Fayre**

**10 people consulted at WPNC's summer BBQ**

**12 consulted during door to door conversations**

TOTAL  
**152** local  
people  
consulted



# Findings

Below is a summary of the main themes and public perceptions to emerge from the people we spoke to.

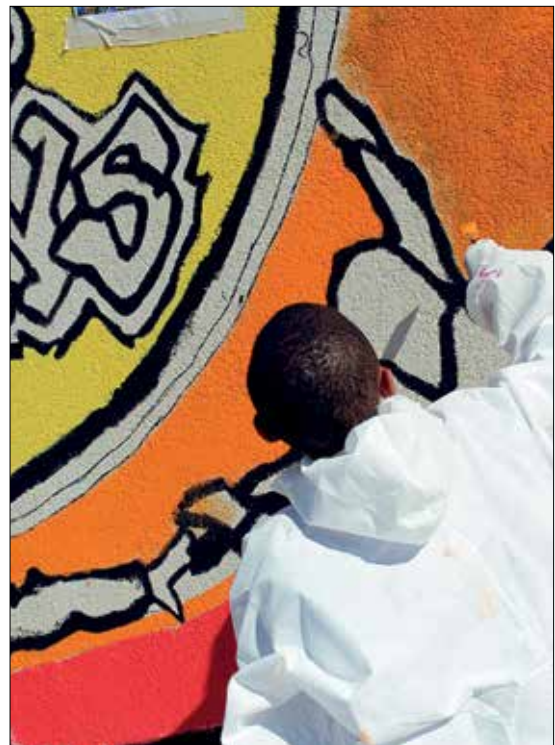
## Safety

Local people expressed desire for the Park to be a safe, welcoming space.

- There were a number of comments about the woodland areas on the Park. Although some local people had concerns about who uses these areas and for what reason, their popularity and importance to local children was also recognised. People felt they encourage imaginative and outdoor play. Some suggested carrying out thinning of the woodland areas would prevent inappropriate use.



- Lots of people felt the need for more activities and facilities for teens and young adults on the Park. There were a number of comments relating to youths driving cars and motorcycles on the Park. People thought that creating activities for local youths to engage in would help reduce anti-social behaviour. Suggestions included graffiti workshops, Parkour sessions and involving young people in making any physical improvements to the Park.





## Cleanliness

- The wide open nature of the Park means that rubbish frequently accumulates in certain areas, particularly around the footprint sculpture and woodlands. Many local people consulted were unaware that when viewed from above, the 'rocky' area on the Park is a sculpture of a footprint. This was installed by local artist Allan Ross (ref) in the 1980's. It has become somewhat run-down and neglected. People also raised issues with 'fly tipping' in the woodland areas. At the time of consultation, there were only three bins on the Park.
- There were also some frustrations about dog owners who fail to clean up after their pets. There was confusion about the lack of any dog waste bins and what to use instead. Some said dog mess prevents them using the large grassy areas for physical activities. People suggested closed off areas for dogs and felt there was a need for more bins, better signage relating to their use and regular emptying of bins in general.



## Community Use

Dog owners and families with small children appeared to be the most dominant groups in terms of park use, with older people most unlikely to use the Park

- The play parks were said to be relatively well-used, although some people raised concerns about the poor condition of play equipment. At the time of consultation there were three play areas, each aimed at a different age group and illogically located at opposite ends of the Park. Parents said the distance between made it hard for them to supervise all their children at once.
- There seems to be something of a fledgling dog walking community, most of whom have a very positive attitude towards the Park. There were concerns about the behaviour of some dog owners, particularly in terms of keeping unruly dogs on leashes and picking up dog mess. Lots of people suggested specific areas for dog walkers would benefit those with and without dogs. People suggested potential for regular dog events on the Park and the opportunity to involve some local dog owners in these as positive role models.
- Older people appeared the most marginalised and unlikely group to use the Park. The reasons for this relate to safety perceptions (poor lighting, fear of crime), accessibility (lack of places to stop and rest) and not feeling as if the Park has anything to offer them. Those who attended the 'Tea in the Park' event really enjoyed the experience of doing Tai Chi and Line Dancing outdoors. They said they would do it again, if there was a marquee or other shelter from the elements. People suggested putting in benches, picnic tables and having more activities and events aimed at older adults might encourage them to use the Park more.



## Park Appeal

There were mixed feelings expressed in relation to the wide open nature of the Park. Whilst some felt this makes it feel exposed and less welcoming and unlike a park; reflected by the fact that many people still refer to it as 'the field'. Others thought of the Park as a big blank canvas with potential to have something for everyone. As such, people suggested dividing it up into sections with different uses for different users.

## Public Aspiration

Of the nine images presented to people showing different types of parks, some were more favoured than others.

- Having natural play features on the Park was by far the most popular; reflecting widespread opinion that the Park is primarily for children. People thought this option would be low cost, easy to install, robust and that it would blend in well to the existing environment.
- Lots of people said they would use the Park more if there were more activities taking place on it; indicated by the popularity of the consultations events. Suggestions included; Tai Chi, fitness sessions, jogging/walking groups, green gym equipment and more local sports clubs using the space. People also thought that having more activities might help resolve safety concerns and restore community confidence in the Park.
- Although people thought that wildlife should be encouraged, they did not envisage West Pilton as being the right kind of place for a nature type park. There were also some concerns about the potential safety of wildlife.
- People were positive about the concept of community gardens but widespread opinion was that there were enough community gardens in the area already.
- People were enthused by the idea of having structures and features that embrace the urban nature of the Park.
- The 'wetland' image encouraged people to consider ways of addressing drainage issues in the lower part of the park; thought to be caused by a burn running underneath. This was the least popular of the images. Lots of people thought water features such as a pond would be impractical and dangerous.



## West Pilton Park Improvement Proposals

The full findings were collated and passed on to Edinburgh Lothian Greenspace Trust (ELGT) for analysis and the development of the following 'West Pilton Park Improvement Proposals.'

### Reclaiming the Woodland Areas

This ELGT plan reflects local suggestion that perceptions of safety might be improved by opening up the woodland spaces, enabling people to see what is happening in these areas. It also considers the popularity of the 'natural play theme' in the Park. There is scope to create natural, informal play areas in the woodlands. Opening them up and increasing their use may also help reduce the litter that accumulates in them, thus improving overall cleanliness of the Park.



### Transforming the grassy bank

The plan to transform the slope on the Park into amphitheatre type informal seating would encourage more spectator sports and community activities to take place. This has potential to bring people together and increase a sense of community spirit. Essentially, the establishment of local teams, clubs and community groups who use the Park could reduce anti-social behaviour, increase integration and become an asset for the local community.

Incorporating formal and informal seating into the grassy bank and along the path that runs in conjunction with it would provide places to rest when walking through the Park, particularly useful for older adults and those with mobility issues. Creating an informal meeting place and increasing the presence of people on the Park may also encourage dog owners to clean up their dog mess.



## Footprint

This ELGT plan suggests that the 'footprint sculpture' could be transformed into a feature for West Pilton Park. It has potential to become a meeting point for activities such as story-telling and walking/running clubs. Its significance in the Park's history could be highlighted and shared with the community by installing information boards nearby. Involving the community in tidying up the footprint and celebrating it as a piece of local art has potential to get more people using the Park, increasing community pride in the sculpture and the Park itself.



## Paved Bins Area

The proposals also suggest the recycling area has potential to become a dedicated space for activities and community gatherings. This could benefit the Park by increasing the number of people using the south end of the Park. As a feature, it could also help formalise the Park's entrance at that end.



## The Northern Connection of ELGT Park Proposals

The proposal to create a new pathway at the northern end of the Park to link up with existing paths has potential to greatly encourage use of the Park. Enabling people to walk around the whole park would increase its appeal and usability. The new paths could also increase the use of the northern woodland area, particularly if the paths went through or close to them.



**Northern connection - New paths**  
 A - B: approximately 185m  
 B - C: approximately 180m  
 Total potential paths - 365m

## Feature Tree Planting

The idea of planting large feature trees to help break up the open ground is intended to create a more welcoming park atmosphere, reflecting public opinion that the Park feels somewhat open and exposed. An additional formal entrance at the Park's northern side where there is currently none, would also be beneficial. Not only would it make the Park more accessible to those living in the vicinity, it would also contribute towards creating a sense of place.



## Wetland area

In this proposal, ELGT have suggested that planting grasses and other plants that thrive in wet or damp conditions might help with drainage issues that are unlikely to be addressed by engineering solutions. Creating a dedicated marshland area on the Park would also add aesthetic value. This proposal also takes on board comments that a pond would be a safety hazard.



# Recommendations

In order for the improvement to occur, there needs to be continued collaborative working between strategic partners, community organisations and local residents.

Recommendations are as follows;

- Support from PCHP and CEC to develop WPPAG into 'Friends of West Pilton Park'. The group will resource and deliver events on the park. A constituted 'Friends of the Park group' will help create ownership of the park as well as opening up funding opportunities. This group will become the first port of call for local stakeholders to involve the community in the implementation of the improvement plans, essential in order to establish and maintain local ownership over the Park. This includes identifying and utilising local expertise in the implementation of any physical improvements to the park where possible.
- Local partners such as PCHP, North Edinburgh Arts Centre, West Pilton Neighbourhood Centre, WPPAG/Friends of WPP and others to liaise with local residents and develop a plan to increase the use of the park. This will involve exploring potential for activities such as free play, parkour sessions, sports and any other physical activity opportunities that arise.
- Strategic stakeholders such as the Forth Neighbourhood Partnership, City of Edinburgh Council (CEC) and other local organisations to develop a strategy for the phased implementation of the improvement proposals.

This includes identification and confirmation on how to resource and who is responsible for carrying out the physical changes detailed in the proposals. In particular this refers to: the laying of new pathways, feature tree planting, the installation of new playground/ parkour equipment, the development of a marshland area and other park furniture such as bins and benches and footprint.

PCHP is committed to doing what it can to support the implementation of these recommendations. In particular, we are committed to supporting WPPAG, developing new activities on the park and bringing partners together to develop ongoing plans for the Park.



# Impact

While recognising there is still some way to go before the Park Improvement Plans become realised, we would like to highlight some of the changes that have occurred as a result of this work.

- As a result of the popularity of the consultation events, WPPAG have since organised and held two popular events on the park. Local people attended the 'Halloween Ghost Hunt' and 'Easter Eggstravaganza' events.
- PCHP development workers met with CEC Parks and Greenspace to share community feedback about the condition of the playparks. We were informed that West Pilton Park play areas are contained within the City Of Edinburgh Council's Play Area Action Plan 2011 to 2016.
- Information on park cleanliness was fed back to the Council. There have also been a number of community 'clean ups' take place, organised by the Council and WPPAG with the involvement of local people and this has made some improvement.
- Funding from the Forestry Commission has enabled ELGT to carry out tree thinning, crown lifting and bulb planting activities in the Parks woodland areas.
- Funding awarded to North Edinburgh Arts Centre to provide a play ranger service on West Pilton Park. Two dedicated play rangers began visiting the park in August 2015 to encourage and lead free play sessions with local children in and around the woodland areas. These sessions have been very popular.
- The 'North Edinburgh Wanderers', a local football club, were keen to claim the Park as their home ground and use it for training. Interventions by PCHP development workers has seen the reinstatement of football pitch lines on the park and helped progress negotiations to use West Pilton Neighbourhood Centre at the weekends, enabling the club to begin training on the Park. Some of the youths involved in the club are those who were previously known for anti-social behaviour and there is also an increasing membership from the local BME community.
- Interest in the footprint was stimulated as a result of this consultation. Subsequent research carried out by North Edinburgh artist in residence has revealed that this 90ft x 30ft sculpture was installed by local artist Allan Ross in the early 1980's.



## Conclusion

West Pilton Park has potential to become a thriving community asset; a space where people of all ages and backgrounds come together to engage in a variety of leisure activities. As people said, it is very much a blank canvas, waiting to be transformed. Most people consulted believed a simple approach would be better valued. No-one came up with any grand design ideas; they all seemed very realistic and achievable.

Having regular activities at different times of the day would increase the number of people using the park and reduce concerns regarding safety. Ultimately, the need for regular events, clubs and sporting activities has been highlighted as one of the best means of increasing the use of the park, reducing antisocial behaviour, addressing perceptions of lack of safety and building community pride and confidence in the park.

In order for the improvements to occur and for the park to realise its full potential it is evident that there needs to be a collaborative, multi-agency approach. This approach needs to encourage and support maximum community involvement wherever possible.

*Lianne Pipskyj and Clare Symonds*



## APPENDIX ONE

### Consultation questions and Images:

- *Does the park have a name*
- *Who uses the park and how*
- *What areas of the park they use and how*
- *What areas of the park they don't use and what stops them*
- *How does the park feel?*
- *How they would like the park to feel*
- *How would they like the park to look*



## Acknowledgements

We would like to thank the following organisations and local people for their participation in this consultation. Without which it would not have been possible.

Forth Neighbourhood Partnership  
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North Edinburgh Arts Centre  
West Pilton neighbourhood Centre  
North Edinburgh Timebank  
MYAdventure  
KABO Boxing Academy  
The Spartans Community Football Academy  
Pilton Equalities Project  
The Prentice Centre

North Edinburgh News  
The North Edinburgh Wanderers  
Dogs in the City  
Sara Martin  
Bill Lothian

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