

Sydney Gardens, Bath

Parks for People HLF Application

August 2018

A photograph of a public consultation event held outdoors at Sydney Gardens in Bath. Several people are gathered around long white tables displaying large-scale landscape design plans and maps. A man in a tan jacket is looking at a blue folder, while a woman in a green top is leaning over a table, pointing at a plan. In the foreground, a man in a dark jacket and blue jeans is looking at a smartphone. The background is filled with lush green trees and other attendees, including a young girl in a yellow dress. The overall atmosphere is one of active public engagement in a park setting.

# Public Consultation & Design Exhibitions Report

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## 1. Overview & Background Context

Proposals for the restoration of Sydney Gardens have been in development for more than 25 years.

The latest proposals follow the de-coupling of the park restoration from that of the Holburne Museum ,and the withdrawal of a stand-alone proposal predicated on the transfer of the park asset to community ownership which the local community rejected (2013). Not surprisingly, after such a protracted and difficult gestation, it has been necessary for the Council to re-build trust with and involvement from, the local communities of neighbours and interest groups connected with the Gardens.

The Friends of Sydney Gardens were formed in 2013 and have collaborated extensively with the Council throughout the process of developing this application. In 2014 a Sydney Gardens Steering Group of the Friends, local residents' associations, ward councillors and the Holburne Museum was set up to begin to plan a revised bid.

Extensive public consultation took place for the Round 1 bid, as detailed in the Timeline below (2). In the Development Phase, we have built on these sound and robust consultations to develop the Design Plans and Activity Plan for Delivery in response to further public consultations.

The representatives of the local Residents Associations, heritage interests, schools and education institutions, local service providers and their clients, voluntary and community groups, local councillors, The Holburne Museum and the Friends of Sydney Gardens, have been fully involved in the collection and interpretation of the information that underpins the proposals and have made their own written comments on the draft proposals as they have evolved.

Our Public Consultations and Design Plan Exhibitions have been available to visit in person at publicised events in Sydney Gardens, online and by post (by request), and most recently at the public library. We have promoted them widely, through the Council portals, social media and our project e-newsletter.

## 2. Timeline

### November 2013

#### Sydney Gardens Community Survey, Sarah Mowl Ltd

In November 2013 a survey of local residents living within 2km of the Gardens was commissioned to better understand what it was that local people valued about the Gardens, the barriers that prevented them from visiting it and their suggestions for improvements. A total of 300 adults were interviewed at home. People from all walks of life were represented: from the retired home owner living in Bathwick to the social housing tenant with young children in Snow Hill. Some 41% of respondents were aged 18-44 and 30% of all respondents had children under the age of 18 in the household. The majority of respondents were White (89%) with a small percentage each from Chinese, Asian, Black, Mixed and other cultural backgrounds.

The key findings from the Community Survey were:

- 92% of local residents had been to Sydney Gardens, visiting on average once a week
- 51% visited at least once a month
- The main reasons to visit were to walk, visit the canal, use as a through route, to relax, use the children's play area or combined with a visit to the Holburne Museum
- 65% of people with junior or senior school children said their children used the park to meet up with friends, as a through route, to visit the canal or use the play area.

No significant barriers to use were identified, other than the absence of things to do there (7%), a lack of time or it being too far away. Over half had attended and enjoyed special events such as a lantern procession, art exhibitions and the Easter Eggstravaganza in recent years.

- 95% agreed that Sydney Gardens was a place for the whole community to enjoy
- 94% agreed that Sydney Gardens was an important amenity on the area
- More than 50% felt there was not enough to do and were dissatisfied with the play area.

Though not of concern to the majority, a significant minority raised safety issues about concealed spaces, poor lighting, sexual activity, drug abuse and drunkenness.

On the subject of need for the restoration project, there was widespread local support (78%), particularly among social housing tenants, for the principle of a restored and updated Sydney Gardens. People wanted:

- More events and activities – open air concerts, plays and performances; special activities for children and young people; art and craft activities
- A better play area
- A café
- More information about the history of the Gardens
- Nature trails and a natural labyrinth.

Some 25% of respondents expressed an interest in joining the Friends and 17% said they would be willing to help in the restoration and future care of Sydney Gardens.

## Round 1: Initial application to Parks for People Fund 2016

In 2016 B&NES commissioned a design team to assist the Parks Service with developing an application for the Heritage Lottery Fund Parks for People Programme to improve Sydney Gardens. An initial masterplan design was submitted to the HLF in September 2016.

### 2015-2016

#### Steering Group meetings

The Friends of Sydney Gardens, the local ward councillors, representatives from the Holburne Museum and the local residents' associations have met every six weeks with B&NES staff since 2015 to develop the restoration proposals and review the outputs of the Project Team. The Project Team attended all the Steering Group meetings between April and July 2016. The members of the Steering Group:

- Value the heritage features of the park and the many layers of history within the landscape; and the people and events associated with it
- Value the sense of peace and tranquillity it imbues in visitors and would not want to see that special quality lost through the over commercialisation of the park
- Are tolerant of the vulnerable people who make use of the park including rough sleepers
- Are concerned about the danger to others caused by inconsiderate cyclists and skateboarders
- Wish to see the Council fulfil its role in caring for the park and its visitors
- Have already volunteered their time and other resources for special projects (such as bulb planting, running guided walks for tourists and publishing a regular newsletter for 1000 local residents) and will continue to do so
- Work well with the local police and local schools to monitor and address anti-social behaviour in the park.

### May 2016

#### Stakeholder Forum

A workshop was held to which representatives from 80 local organisations (from the heritage, community, education, health and wellbeing, social care, disability, arts, sports and recreation sectors) were invited. A total of 32 representatives attended the workshop and participated in group discussions focussed on the heritage, landscape, play and activities. They wanted:

- Production of a comprehensive heritage statement on the heritage features of the park
- Creative and imaginative interpretation to meet all needs
- Restoration of all the buildings in the park and new uses found for the Bothy and Bowling Pavilion
- Relocation of the Depot
- Improvements to street furniture, lighting and signage
- Retention of tennis facilities
- Upgrading of play facilities and the installation of new features
- The reduction of conflict between pedestrians and cyclists within the park
- A café with an offer aimed at families
- A lively, but not too noisy, programme of events and activities for all ages and abilities but for young people in particular
- Opportunities for volunteering to enhance the landscape, support visits, create an archive and improve people's health and wellbeing.

In a number of follow up emails from this Stakeholder Forum a number of additional points were raised from parent governors and PTA representatives from the local schools.

#### April-June 2016

##### Visitor Observation Survey

With the significant help of volunteers from the Friends of Sydney Gardens, a visitor observation survey of the users of Sydney Gardens was completed between April and June 2016 on fine weather days. A total of 1483 visitors were counted and profiled over 12 hours of recording split between weekdays and weekend days and days in school term time and

school holiday time. This indicates that there are around 124 visits per hour to this park, with an estimated 465,778 visits per year.

## June 2016

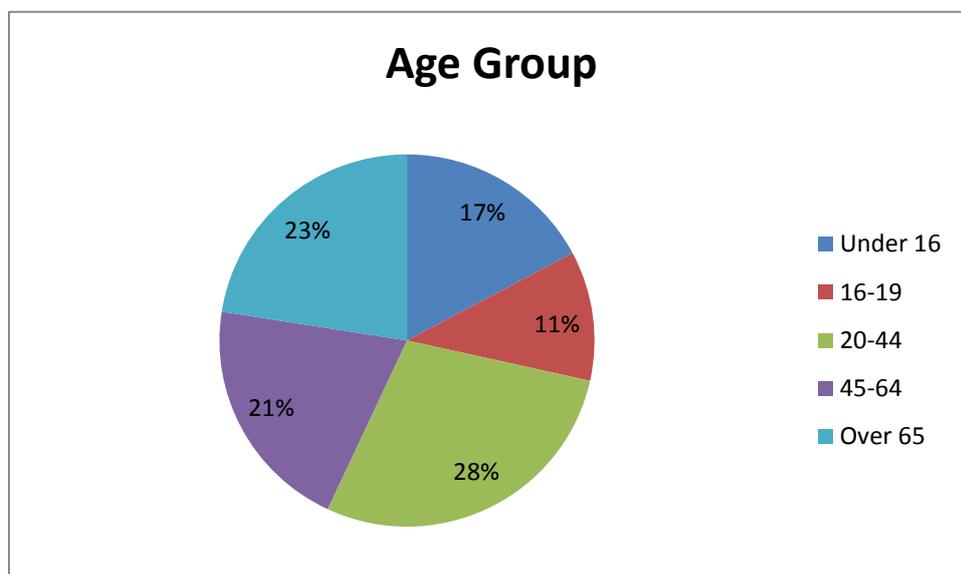
### Public Consultation on Draft Master Plan and Activity Proposals

A public consultation event was held outside the Gardener's Lodge in Sydney Gardens in June 2016 (during the half term holiday) from 1-6pm on a warm, dry and sunny day. The proposals were presented on nine photographic panels highlighting the restoration challenges and their potential solutions. Five members of the Design Team and six volunteers from the Friends were on hand to explain the details. The participants were asked to place green dots beside the proposals they liked and red dots against those that they disliked. They were also encouraged to add comments and further suggestions on post-it notes.

Supervised play activities were provided for young children to enable their parents to fully participate in the consultation. A total of 125 adults gave their responses to the draft proposals. Ideas were also collected by the Play Rangers in conversation with a handful of young children and 26 teenagers completed a questionnaire.

The profile of participants at this public consultation was fairly evenly spread across the age groups and participants from non-White backgrounds totalled 6%.

#### *Profile of respondents to the Public Consultation 2nd June 2016*



The results of this public consultation in June 2016 more than any other have informed the revision of the draft proposals and shaped the final proposals on heritage, landscape, play and activities submitted in the 2016 Round 1 bid.

## June 2016

### Teenager Survey

Given the views of parents in the 2013 Community Survey that there was not enough for older children to do in the park, the proximity of the park to a large secondary school (King Edward's School) and the prevalence of young people in Walcot Ward in particular, it was considered important to gather the views of teenagers. In June 2016, 26 teenagers completed a short questionnaire survey in the park and another seven answered the survey online. Though only a small sample, the findings confirmed the parents' views (expressed in the 2013 Community Survey) that young people:

- Liked Sydney Gardens principally as a place to meet up with friends and relax
- Valued it for its natural beauty, the quality of its grounds and its safety
- Were put off from visiting by the lack of things to do, the dark quiet corners, and its distance from home
- Would like to see more adult-sized play and fitness equipment, special events, a performance space, plenty of benches and display space for artworks.

The following quotes from the teenagers were typical:

*"Could do with more activities and seating. Very nice apart from when a train passes. The tennis courts need to be renovated. Big bean bags might be a cool addition."*

*"I would come to gigs with my friends and open mics."*

*"Special events – not too noisy"*

*"Add space for get-togethers, festivals e.g. a permanent tent or sheltered area – not a stage."*

## July and early August 2016

### Revised Masterplan

The Project Team presented the revised master plan proposals for the capital works and the activity plan to the general public and stakeholders to test the level of public support for the project. Comments were invited:

- Online
- From shoppers at Morrison's supermarket, Snowhill/London Road
- From visitors to the park, the Sydney Garden Steering Group and stakeholders at a drop in event

There was strong support (more than 70%) for most of the master plan proposals and there were many appreciative comments such as 'Brilliant', 'Excellent', 'All really worthwhile' and:

"It's important to look after the historic features. I enjoy being able to walk down the canal from Grosvenor Bridge to get into the park."

"I might be interested in volunteering – supporting visitors, doing walks, IT, leaflet and website design."

"Overall a good plan to upgrade and modify the layout. Not sure if the lower tennis courts should be replaced."

## Round 2: Development Phase 2017 -2018

In December 2016 B&NES were awarded a grant from the Heritage Lottery Fund to develop the plans for Sydney Gardens in order to submit a full application in August 2018. Between May and July 2017 a new project team of a Project Manager, Community Ranger and Heritage Landscape Management Intern were recruited for the Development Phase.

### 2017-2018

#### Steering group meetings

The Sydney Gardens Steering Group continued to meet once a quarter through the Development Phase. The Canal & Rivers Trust were invited onto the Steering Group due to the close relationship between Sydney Gardens and the Kennet and Avon Canal, such as the extensive clearing and restoration work done by CRT volunteers on the stretch of canal that runs through the park.

### July 2017

#### Informal consultation at Bath Carnival

Bath Carnival was held in Sydney Gardens presenting an opportunity to reach a large audience of local people and gain some initial public feedback on the masterplan design. Members of the Friends of Sydney Gardens joined the new Project Team in engaging the public and discussing the potential works in Sydney gardens. 110 people visited the stall or were given leaflets about the project, with 23 signing up to receive a newsletter with updates about the project.

### November 2017

#### Public Consultation at the Gardener's Lodge & Online

The Project Team and Design team presented a consultation with questionnaire in the Gardener's Lodge in Sydney Gardens for a half day. To try and encourage engagement with the consultation, and heritage of the gardens, the Sydney Gardens Labyrinth was opened up to the public – a volunteer project led by the Project Team to recreate the historic Georgian labyrinth by mowing the original pattern into the overgrown Bowls Club lawn.

17 questionnaires were completed on the day with additional informal responses about the Labyrinth – children were asked to draw what they thought should go in the centre. An online consultation also ran on the B&NES website from the 25<sup>th</sup> of November to the 17<sup>th</sup> of December with 19 questionnaires completed and additional responses via email. Overall the feedback was supportive of the changes to the initial masterplan, such as removing the amphitheatre. However removal of three out of the five tennis courts received negative feedback with many park users questioning this choice.

### April 2018

#### Public Exhibition of design plan at Sydney Gardens Community Day and Bath Central Library

Originally this was conceived as the final masterplan consultation. However, with the extensive previous consultations it was felt that the community was at risk of 'consultation fatigue' and at this stage there would be little change to the masterplan – feedback from consultations had already been taken into account. It was decided that it would be best to frame this as an exhibition, ask for comments and gauge public feeling about the final masterplan but not officially consult.

Respondents were asked whether they agreed (Yes), disagreed (No) or didn't know (DK) about 5 key proposals and then were asked for any other comments. NR - signifies no response.

#### Key proposals:

1. The retention of 4 tennis courts
2. The replacement of the bowls pavilion with a kiosk café and outdoor seating
3. The re-location of the labyrinth to the top of the park beside the tennis courts
4. Would you support swings in the gardens, for all ages to use?
5. We are proposing to restore and move the historic ladies loo to across the path to a better location, so it can be used to support volunteer activities. Do you support this?

76 people submitted feedback forms from the Community Day in the park on 22nd April. This exhibition was accompanied by members of the Project Team, the consultant team and Alison Millward who were available to discuss the plans with members of the public in person and ran for 3 hours.

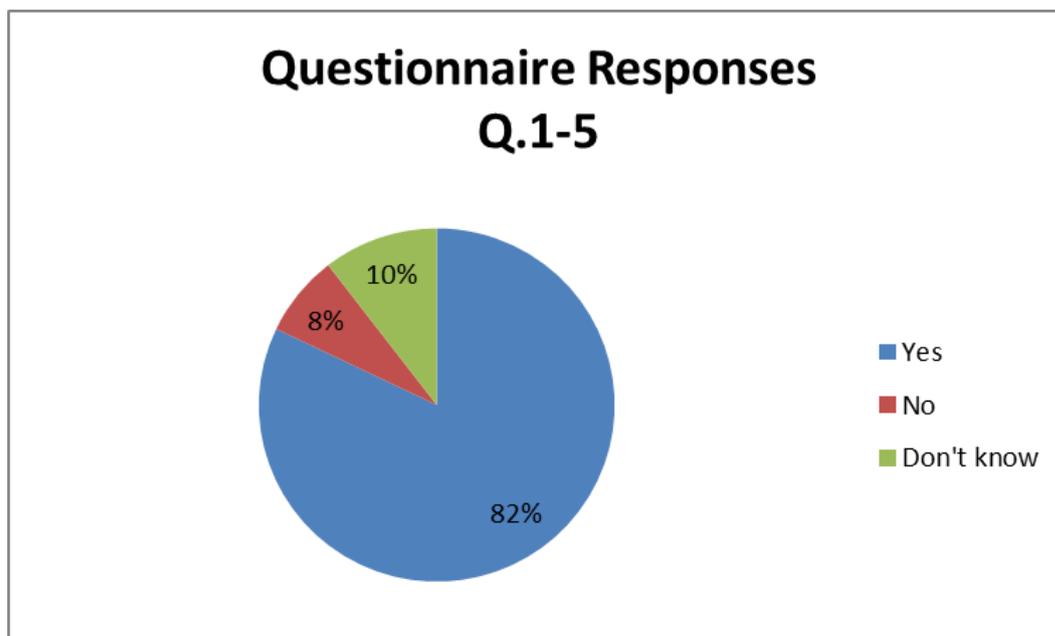
21 people submitted feedback forms from the exhibition at Bath Central Library. This exhibition was unaccompanied and ran for 2 weeks.

1 person submitted a feedback via email after looking at the design plans online.

98 total feedback forms were submitted.

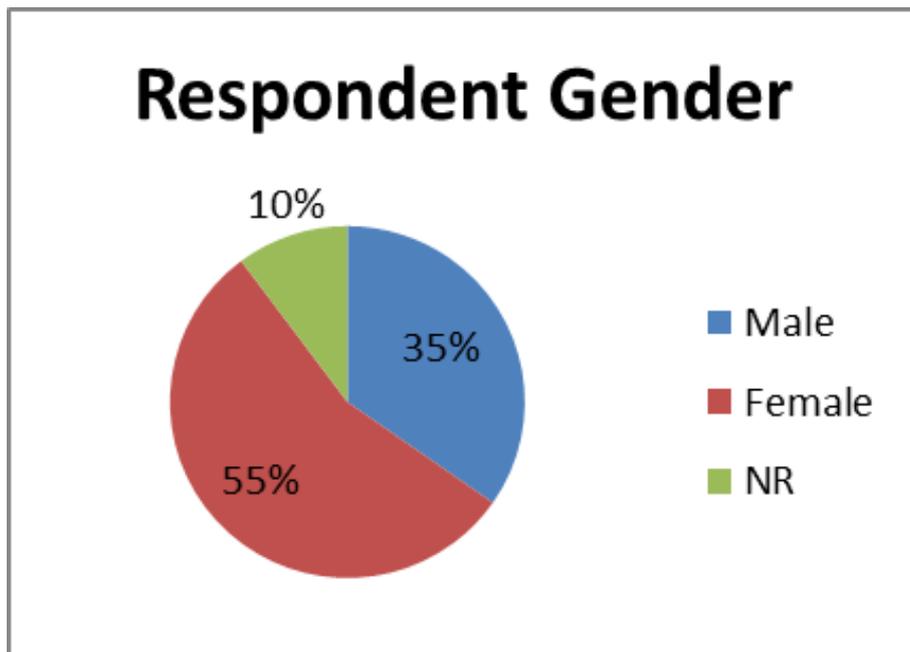
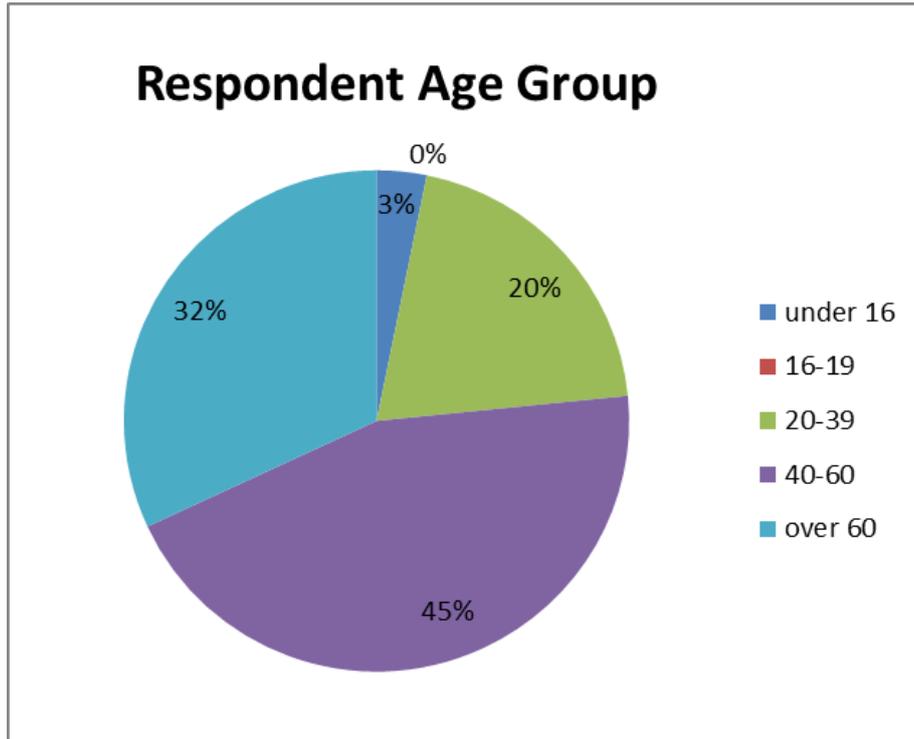
Overall the responses were very positive, with a majority of respondents agreeing with all 5 proposals, and many positive comments.

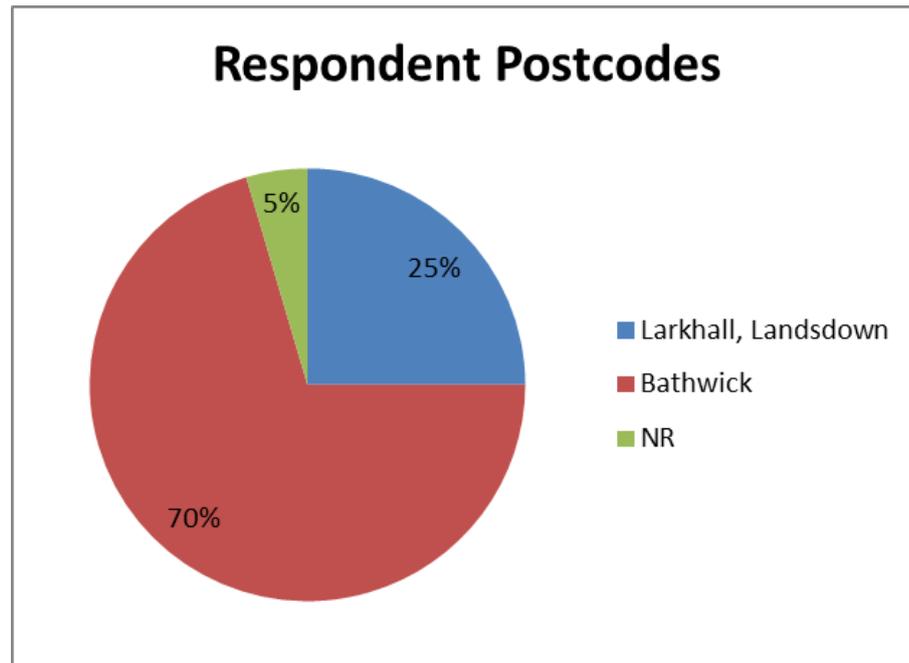
The most popular option was the provision of swings for all ages, with 87% respondents agreeing and only 3% disagreeing.



When given the opportunity to provide other comments, most provided suggestions for the park such as more seating, play equipment for all ages and concerts. 36% were actively positive about the proposals e.g. 'Great idea, great for the community.' and only 12% gave negative comments e.g. 'Children's play area right on busy roadside - pollution will be very bad'.

The largest demographic of respondents was aged 40-60, female and lived in a BA2 postcode area. There were no responses from under 16s in this round of feedback, however this has been addressed by commissioning the Bath Area Play Project to consult directly with children and families.





### Development Phase

#### Informal 1 to 1 Consultations

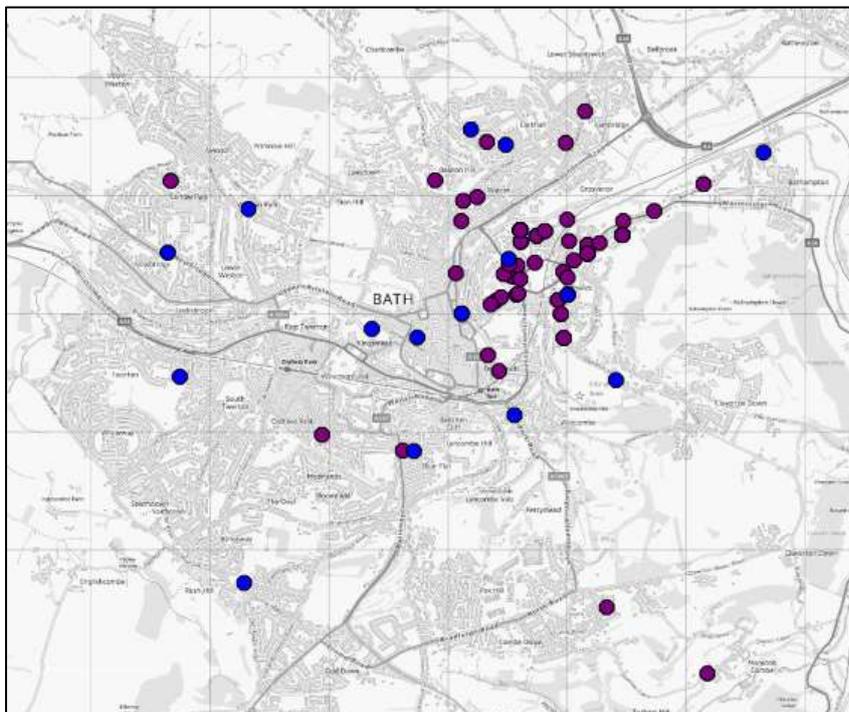
The Community Ranger also met with people and residents in person in the park throughout the Development Phase. These informal meetings were to discuss a variety of issues/topics of concern; about tennis, cycling, the railway, disability and access, dementia. Comments, feedback and communications from these 1 to 1 consultations were kept with our other consultation responses, and as much as possible were integrated into the design plans and Activity Plan.

### 3. Participant Postcode Data Map

During the Development phase an interactive map comparing the location of attendees from our events, consultations and outreach using postcodes collected from feedback forms was commissioned from the Bath and North East Somerset Council GIS Team.

154 postcodes were collected from the Development Phase events & activities, the November 2017 consultation, April design exhibition and engagement research done by the Bath Area Play Project. In the case of BAPP postcodes were based on the location of the community group/school/church/scout group being interviewed rather than the postcodes of individuals.

Several postcodes from Bristol and Swindon were excluded from the data set to make the map more readable concentrating on the Bath area as this was our focus.



Plotting the data in this way allows us to look at the overall reach of the project and identify whether different consultations reached different (geographical) audiences. For example we can compare respondents to our April Exhibition; those who visited at the Community Day event held in the park are purple while those who completed a feedback

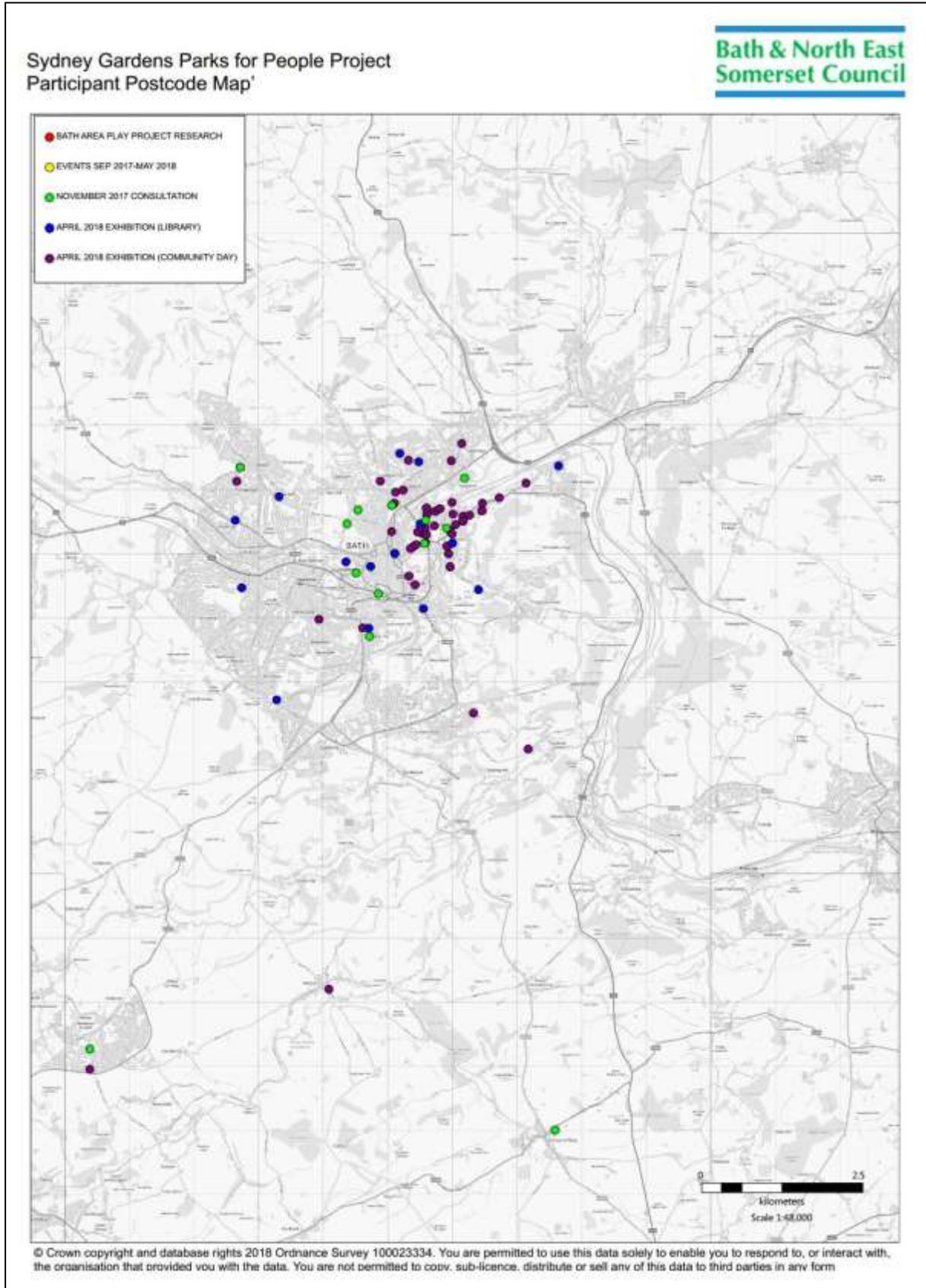
form while the exhibition was shown at Bath Central Library are shown in blue.

Unsurprisingly we can see that the respondents from the Community Day are concentrated around Sydney Gardens and Bathwick.

The library display had a wider geographical base, demonstrating that the library was an effective place to access the wider Bath population. It was also interesting to see how many respondents attending the Community Day were based along the Warminster Road, and obvious that the gardens are highly important in the immediate surroundings based on the concentration of feedback from this area. Overall we were pleased to see the geographic reach, particularly for those attending events (yellow dots) showing that people are willing

to come more than walking distance to events in Sydney Gardens, despite issues around a lack of parking.

*Comparison of postcodes collected from November 2017 and April 2018 consultations.*



Map showing participants from consultations, events and the Bath Area Play Project outreach.

