

Report on the 2010 Consultation on Leechwell Garden

by Gill Dunne

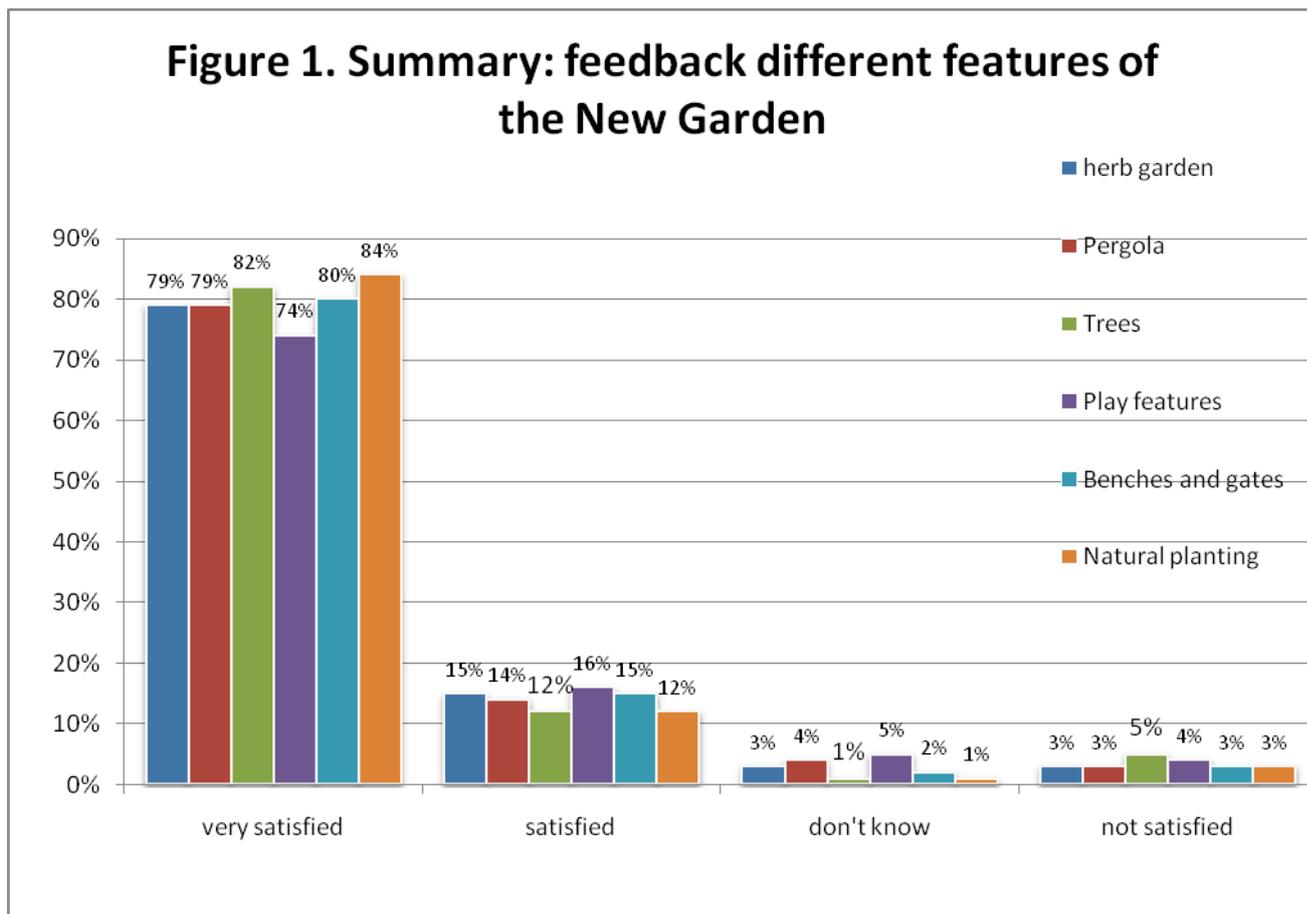
LEECHWELL GARDEN CONSULTATION FEEDBACK

Below we have summarised the feedback of 204 respondents collected in two consultations, one in November 2009 and one in March 2010. 48 respondents completed feedback sheets in the November survey and 156 in March 2010 (44 of which were completed on-line). Plans for the garden had been made available for viewing (on-line and in various town venues) and 189 (93%) respondents said they had seen the plans. Almost all respondents (96%) are South Hams residents, most live in Totnes (85%) and within walking distance of the garden (86%). Seventeen reported special needs re: access

1. SHORT SUMMARY

Feedback on plans

A most striking feature of the feedback was the extent to which respondents felt that community wishes had been successfully interpreted in the plans for the new garden – see figure 1. Almost all reported being very satisfied or satisfied with all features. There were a few 'don't knows' expressed on an/some aspects and a small minority expressed dissatisfaction. Most popular was the way that community wishes had been interpreted in relation to the natural planting (96% satisfied or very satisfied), followed by benches (95%) then trees (94%) and herb garden (94%), pergola (93%) and informal play (90%).



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Using the garden

The feedback suggests that the new garden is going to be a very valuable resource for the town and feature prominently in the lives of Totnes residents and visitors. Almost all respondents (97%) expected to visit the garden – usually on foot (83%) Frequent visits were likely, with 65% of the sample saying that they would visit the new garden at least once a week. Respondents estimated the number of people from their household who would be visiting the garden– in excess of 427 people. The majority wanted to use the garden to walk and relax. Many (28%) expressed a desire to help to care for the garden was a popular desire and several provided contact details.

As we will see later, there were lots of ideas about how the garden could be used. For example, its value for community events, as performance and exhibition space, as a place where wildlife can be nurtured, as a place of fun – treasure hunts, nature trails, as a peaceful place for sitting, meditation, as a sociable space for meeting new people and a place for the exhibiting of art.

Visitors Ages Speaking on behalf of 418 people, respondents noted the age groups that they and their companions fell into. The majority of visitors (32%) were aged 60 plus, and 17% were aged under 10.

Written Comments:

Most respondents had taken the time to write comments (some will be incorporated into relevant sections of this report). Expressions of delight with the plans and the prospect of a garden in central Totnes dominated written feedback. The process was described as ‘a wonderful example of community involvement’ and there were expressions of gratitude to all those who had worked hard to realise community wishes.

11. *Good consultation event – leaflet through the door plus very good plans and photographs (particularly the most recent ones). Very well managed; thank you. I look forward to visiting.*
25: *As a resident in the centre of town I am delighted with the plans and am very grateful to all those people who have been working to get the site to this point. I look forward to its implementation.*
26: *It's a brilliant project and thanks so much for making it happen!*
35: *This garden seems remarkably well designed. I'm looking forward to enjoying having such a pleasurable addition to the amenities of Totnes.*
37: *What marvellous hardworking altruistic people the LGA Committee must be. I would really like to award them a medal.*
161: *Good use of space.*
163: *All ideas are great – well thought out.*
165: *Wonderful overall thoughtful vision.*
166: *Congratulations and well done.*
177: *Much needed green space in the centre of town – this plan delightfully provides some child play space and blends with the character of Totnes.*
189: *Great – it will be wonderful to have it so close.*
193: *Not a great deal to add, except to say that I love the idea and am very excited about it.*
185: *Nice to hear about the exciting plans. New imaginative ways of using public space.*
187: *Will satisfy a great need in Totnes. Green open space in the centre.*
186: *This will be a big bonus for the town.*
190: *I am deeply impressed with the quality of work that is ongoing in the garden. It is so important for the town to finally have a decent park and I look forward to it being open to all and to getting involved.*

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Dissatisfaction

Set against these very positive evaluations were some quite negative responses. Interestingly these expressions of dissatisfaction were almost all contained within the March 2010 consultation (we will return to this later) and most relate to the views of eight respondents (4%) who reported dissatisfaction with all or almost all aspects of the garden. Those who elaborated made similar points and tended to be unhappy with the loss of trees and felt that all or most of the new features were inappropriate (id 3, id 18, id 24, id 140, id 202, id 203, id 204, id 205).

140: This is a contrived and artificial space. What a missed opportunity to retain ancient woodland.

Further comments

Respondents also offered advice on the implementation of the various features – there were offers of trees and plants and help. There were also comments that expressed a variety of concerns - as we will see later these included worries about vandalism and litter, drunks, garden maintenance and dogs. A selection of written comments is included in relevant sections and at the end of this report.

199: Wonderful plan – ideal garden for me and my family – worry about litter – alcohol drinking teenagers – summer – all – night parties etc. I am sure this has all been thought of. What is plan for regular maintenance and daily attention?

150: Worried about maintenance.

8: Will a maintenance group be formed to keep the area tidy and clear of rubbish?

178: Maintenance key, bird-feeding places. It's a great idea – great achievement – well done.

141: ... But worried about rubbish. Bins please.

210 Good recycling rubbish bins needed please.

142: Concerned about drunks – no alcohol.

195: We are so pleased to hear that the park will be dog free – since my son with special needs is terrified of them – there are few places to go without dogs.

191: Would be great as long as there are no dogs.

Alternatively:

149: One of the most needed things in Totnes is safe, open – spaces for dogs!!! Essential to see people clean up after their dogs.

Offers of help

Many (28%) expressed a desire to help to care for the garden was a popular desire and several provided contact details.

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2. DETAILED SUMMARY

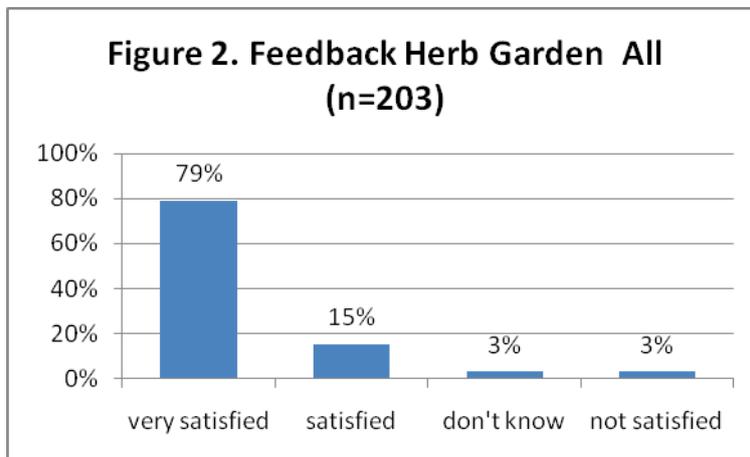
We can see from Table 1. That most respondents in both the November 2009 and March 2010 survey were very satisfied with how community wishes had been interpreted in the plans. This positive sentiment extended to all features of the new garden. The following six figures focus on individual features. Responses from the November 2009 consultation and the March 2010 consultations are combined.

Table 1. Summary of views on how community wishes had been interpreted in the plans – November 2009, March 2010, All (number and percentage).

How Phase 2 community wishes have been interpreted		Very satisfied	Satisfied	Don't know/not sure	Not satisfied
a. Herb garden: designed to be a sunny, wheelchair- accessible sensory garden with seats and raised beds to encourage involvement for all.	NOV	39 = 81%	8 = 17%	1 = 2%	0
	MARCH	122 = 79%	22 = 14%	5 = 3%	6 = 4%
	ALL	161 = 79%	30 = 15%	6 = 3%	6 = 3%
Total 203					
b. Adjacent pergola: locally made of sustainable wood, forming a shady walk with fragrant climbers. Marks entry to main wheelchair- accessible path and herb garden.	NOV	38 = 79%	8 = 17%	2 = 4%	0
	MARCH	122 = 79%	20 = 13%	6 = 4%	6 = 4%
	ALL	160 = 79%	28 = 14%	8 = 4%	6 = 3%
Total 202					
c. Trees: locally sourced mix of ornamental and indigenous varieties of woodland, fruit and nut trees. Enhanced planting on eastern (road) boundary of garden.	NOV	38 = 79%	10 = 21%	0	0
	MARCH	129 = 83%	14 = 9%	2 = 1%	11 = 7%
	ALL	167 = 82%	24 = 12%	2 = 1%	11 = 5%
Total 204					
d. Informal play features: incorporating natural materials to encourage imaginative games. Trickling water and very shallow 'paddling' area nearby.	NOV	33 = 69%	11 = 23%	3 = 6%	1 = 2%
	MARCH	118 = 76%	22 = 14%	8 = 5%	7 = 5%
	ALL	151 = 74%	33 = 16%	11 = 5%	8 = 4%
Total 203 (99% rounding error)					
e. Benches and gates: these will be locally designed unique, attractive <i>functional art</i> .	NOV	36 = 75%	11 = 23%	1 = 2%	0
	MARCH	126 = 81%	20 = 13%	3 = 2%	6 = 4%
	ALL	162 = 80%	31 = 15%	4 = 2%	6 = 3%
Total 203					
f. Natural planting: emphasis on sustainability, wildlife and minimal maintenance, to include wild flowers, bulbs, meadow grass, bark and mown paths.	NOV	41 = 85%	7 = 15%	0	0
	MARCH	130 = 84%	18 = 12%	1 = 1%	6 = 4%
	ALL	171 = 84%	25 = 12%	1 = 1%	6 = 3%
Total 203					

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a. **Herb garden:** designed to be a sunny, wheelchair- accessible sensory garden with seats and raised beds to encourage involvement for all.



The Herb Garden was popular with 94% of respondents reporting being very satisfied or satisfied. It was seen as offering a sociable space and an opportunity for contemplation and getting close to nature. There were comments about the care that had been taken in providing access to all – prams and wheelchairs.

Written comments

158: Nice to sit down.

169: I'm over 80 years old. Just moved to shelter housing, no garden of my own. Miss my own garden and flowers, so this will be lovely, and I may meet new people in the herb garden.

190: Wheelchair/mobility scooter access is so important and I'm very glad to see this is very much integrated into the plans.

177: Interest in the development of the herb garden and in viewing public art. Happy to help.

181: Herbs good for health – stress. Children love herb gardens

Alternatively:

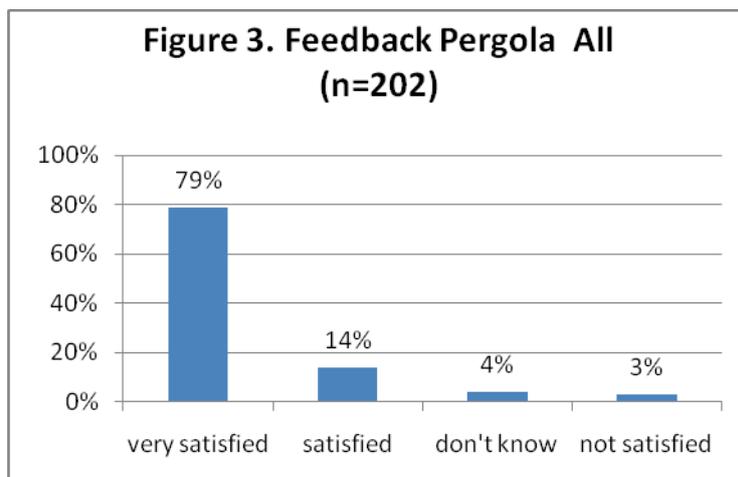
203: Herb garden and pergola look out of place in what was an area full of trees – too suburban

24: Herb garden – rather a worry in the English climate.

133: The plans in the library show a 'sensory' area to the garden (the herb garden). It would be good if this could appeal to ALL of the senses – not just smell/sight.

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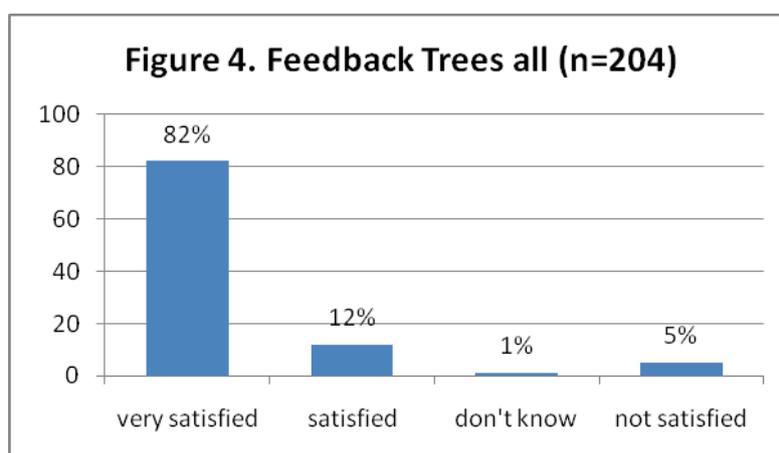
b. **Adjacent pergola:** locally made of sustainable wood, forming a shady walk with fragrant climbers. Marks entry to main wheelchair- accessible path and herb garden.



Written comments:

24. Pergola – could this be replaced with a ‘living’ structure.

c. **Trees:** locally sourced mix of ornamental and indigenous varieties of woodland, fruit and nut trees. Enhanced planting on eastern (road) boundary of garden.



Comments:

168: Pleased about fruit and nut trees.

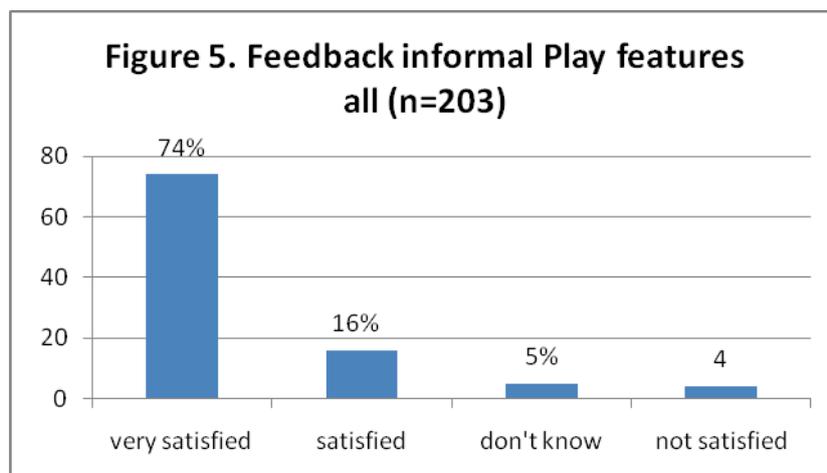
153: c/f. Unusual decorative trees would be good.

203. Would like to see more ‘English’ trees and big ones to replace one chopped down. More natural planting needed.

151: Please plant a-Pocket-handkerchief tree.

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d. **Informal play features:** incorporating natural materials to encourage imaginative games. Trickling water and very shallow 'paddling' area nearby.



Written Comments

This was the most commented upon feature of the garden. While there was a high level of support (90%) for the informal play features as interpreted in the plans, the written comments were more varied and expressed some very contradictory desires - perhaps reflecting the overall lack of play areas for small children in Totnes. Some hoped for greater and more clearly defined play provision others a more minimalist space.

135: *Delighted! I am new to Totnes and love it here, but my little girl does not have place to play.*

210: *There's nowhere to take small children currently to play. There will be lots of parents and grandparents there: as I will be frequently.*

1: *I would like to see more provision for children within the garden. I think with some imagination there could have been some more features planned to encourage play, perhaps appealing to adults also.*

146: *Water feature is the best. Would love to see spaces to make dens, rope swings, pile of earth to dig (9 year old.)*

164: *Good area for my children to play in safety. Nice space for picnics etc.*

177: *Much needed green space in the centre of town – this plan delightfully provides some child play space and blends with the character of Totnes.*

182: *Most interested in children's play area.*

209: *Play equipment may need a lot of thought so as not to compromise too much either way – aesthetic – function any unprotected water and children/animals = problems.*

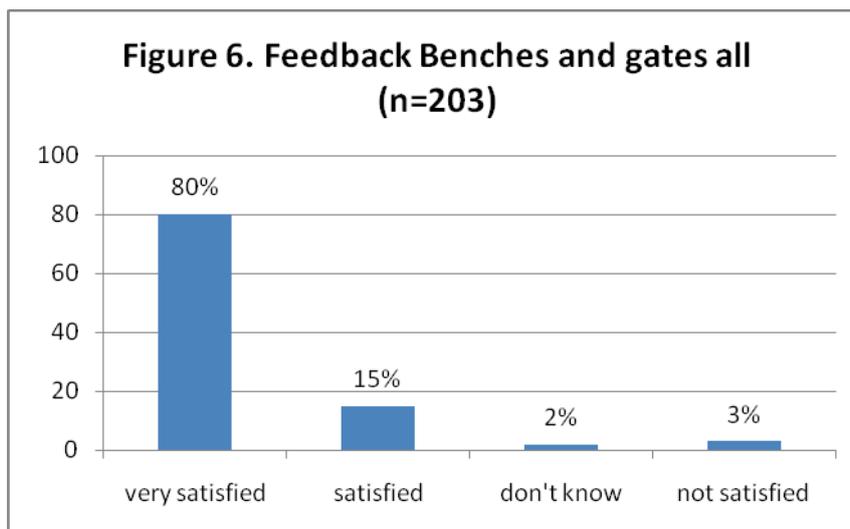
17: *...There are a number of young families squeezed into small 2 bed houses without gardens in the Carrions that are very excited about having a garden nearby to use....*

Those with young children that would benefit and I believe it is important not to let the opportunity of creating an exciting and safe place to play slip by...I am keen on natural play areas and again a further example and inspiration could be taken from Occombe Farm (all wood but more stimulating than a log!!). Children love play areas and particularly swings, absolutely implore you not to lose this opportunity and to make a real difference to the quality of our young children's lives. I can not stress this enough. Thanks and I hope you listen. My view represents the opinion of 4 separate families in my row of houses.

31: *How on earth are children supposed to 'play' with a 'logs and a timber seat'? It smacks of 'oh, we haven't provided for the children, I know, we'll call some logs and a seat the children's play area. We need more PROPER play equipment in town like those of Newton Abbott and Teignmouth*

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e. **Benches and gates:** these will be locally designed unique, attractive *functional art*.



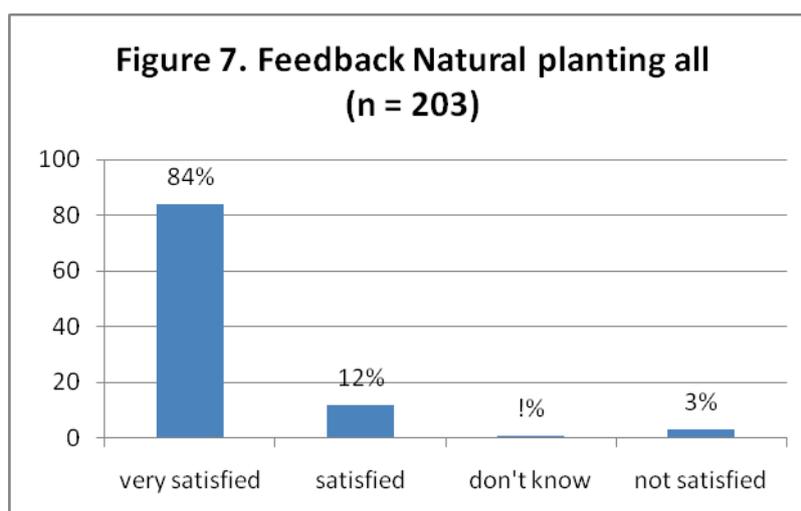
Again there was a high level of support for benches – although some worried about vandalism and cost.

154: Lots of seats please – for us ‘oldies’. Thanks.

149. The seats look nice but suggest some metal seats would be less liable to vandalism.

142 .How much do the benches and gates cost?

f. **Natural planting:** emphasis on sustainability, wildlife and minimal maintenance, to include wild flowers, bulbs, meadow grass, bark and mown paths.



Most popular was the interpretation of community wishes in relation to the natural planting with 96% satisfied or very satisfied.

Written comments

32: I hope there will be some substantial evergreen planting to maintain interest

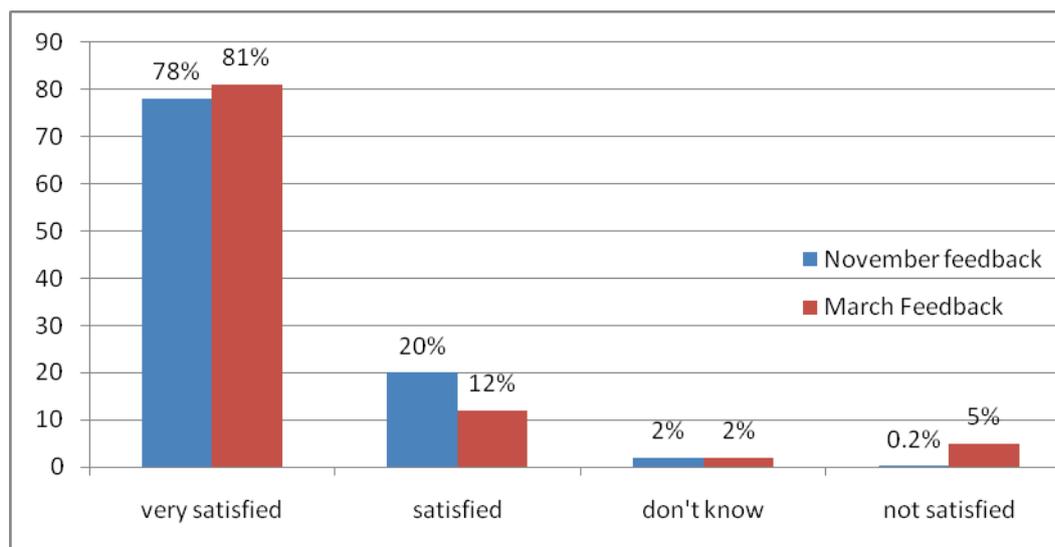
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and privacy in winter.

Comparison November 2009 survey and March 2010 Survey.

Both the November 2009 and March 2010 consultations reveal that the vast majority of respondents are very satisfied (78% and 81%) or satisfied (20% and 12%) with how community wishes have been interpreted in the garden plans.

Figure 8. Comparison feedback on how phase 2 community wishes have been interpreted (average % responses to all features, November 2009 and March 2010 consultation (n=204).



Interestingly when we compare the responses of the November 2009 consultation with the March 2010 consultation we see some evidence of polarization. Here we see that the percentage of responses falling into the 'very satisfied' category has risen from 78% to 81% and the percentage that are 'not satisfied' rising from less than 1% to 5%. Closer examination reveals that most relate to the views of eight respondents (4%) who reported dissatisfaction with all or almost all aspects of the garden.

Negative comments Looking at the qualitative data (hand written comments) a main source of dissatisfaction relates to the disturbance of the original garden – the removal of trees and undergrowth. Understandably people were sad that so many trees had to be felled. Others felt that the garden was offering too much and should remain wild.

19.: I would really have liked the gardens to be as near to natural English woodland as possible. A lot of town folk do not experience woodland and therefore are missing out on one of nature's wonders.

12: It looks like lots of trees are going to be taken down for a large area of grass. What is the point of cutting down existing trees to plant new ones? I think the garden will be much nicer if it is a bit more secluded from the parking lots and roads.

3. You are creating a totally unnatural artificial environment. You are all on a big ego trip. You had the opportunity to create a really special area within a town setting. Despite your interesting proposals, you have failed to retain the magic of the original woodland and have wrecked the site. What you have lost is shameful and an act of insensitive wilful damage. Pergolas, benches and herb gardens have no place in this environment.

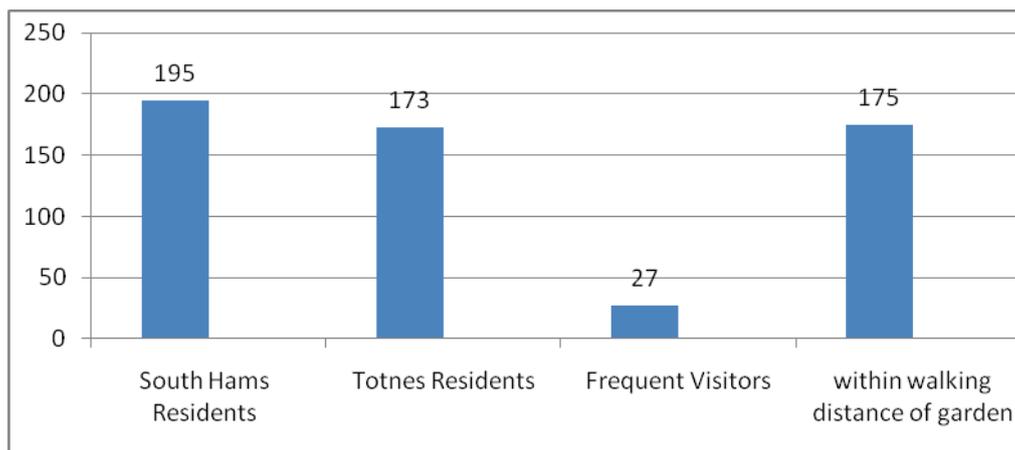
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205: Just too many things in too small a space! Such a shame – we thought it would have lots of trees and bushes and some simple benches – a bit over the top.

Where respondents lived

Almost all (96%) respondents were South Hams residents and lived in Totnes (85%). Those who did not live in Totnes were frequent visitors (8%) who either worked in Totnes or had children at school in Totnes. Most respondents (86%) lived within walking distance of the new garden.

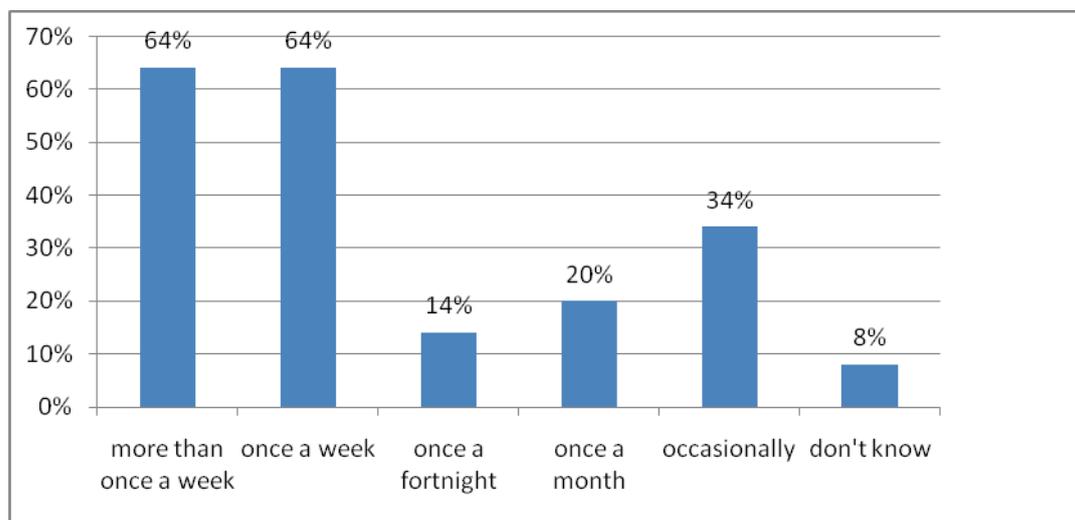
Figure 9. Where respondents lived (n=204)



Use of Garden

Given their proximity, the lack of private gardens and green spaces in the centre of town, it is not surprising that almost all (97%) respondents said that they and/or members of their household were likely to use the new garden. Frequent visits were likely with a sizable majority (65%) saying that they would visit the new garden at least once a week.

Figure 10. Frequency of visits to the new garden %

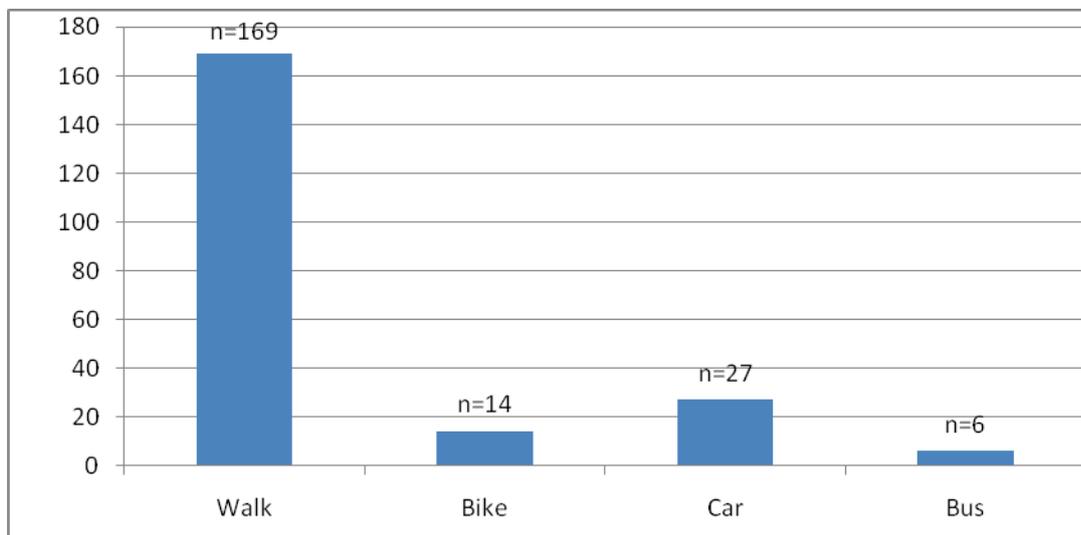


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Getting to the new garden Most (83%) respondents would walk (n=169) to the new garden, others would come by bike, car or bus or a combination of these. Seventeen respondents reported that they or members of their household would have special access needs – wheel chair, prams etc.

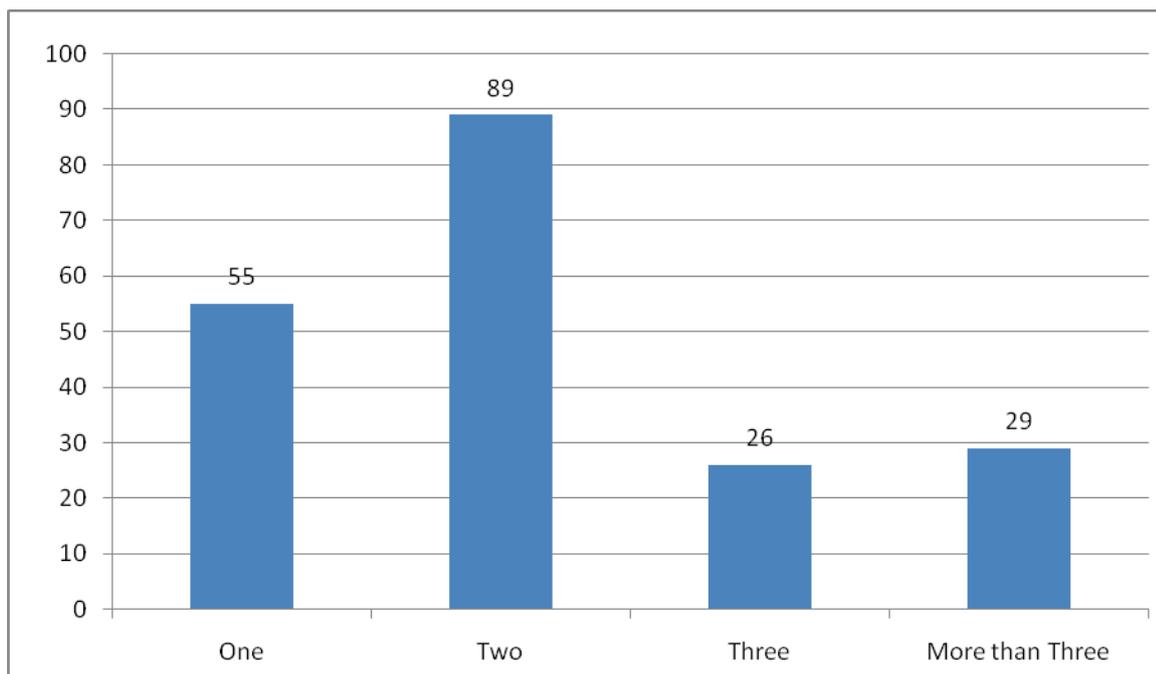
Figure 11. Means of getting to the new garden



Number and ages of visitors

Respondents estimated the number and ages of people that would be coming with them when they visited the garden.

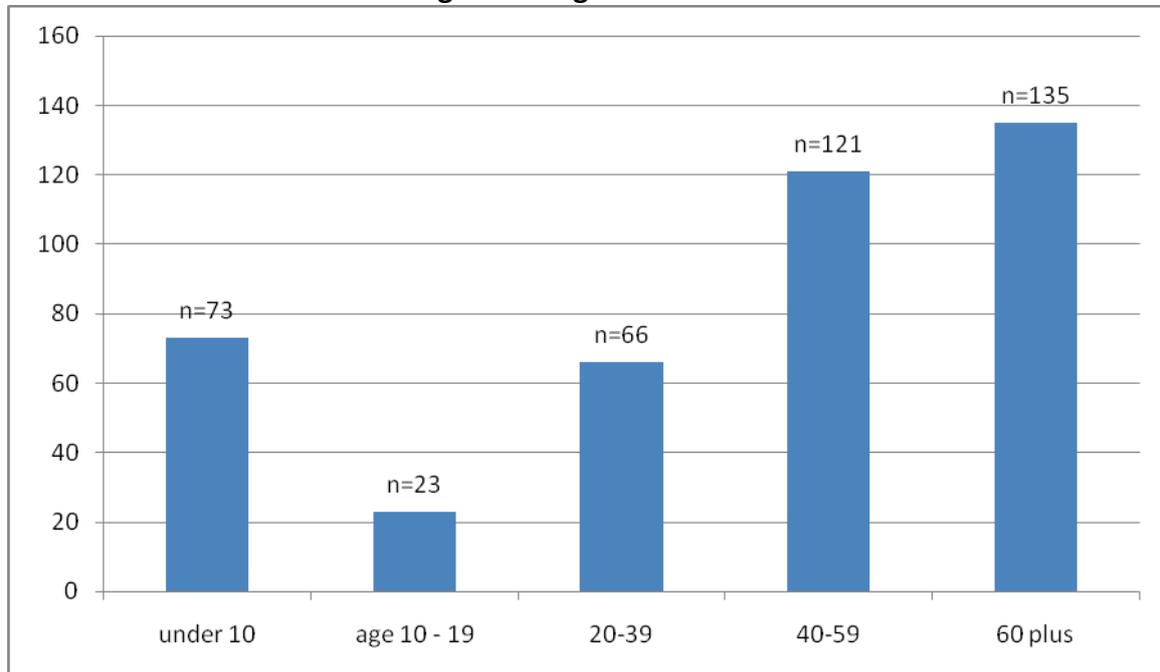
Figure 12. Number of visitors from each household



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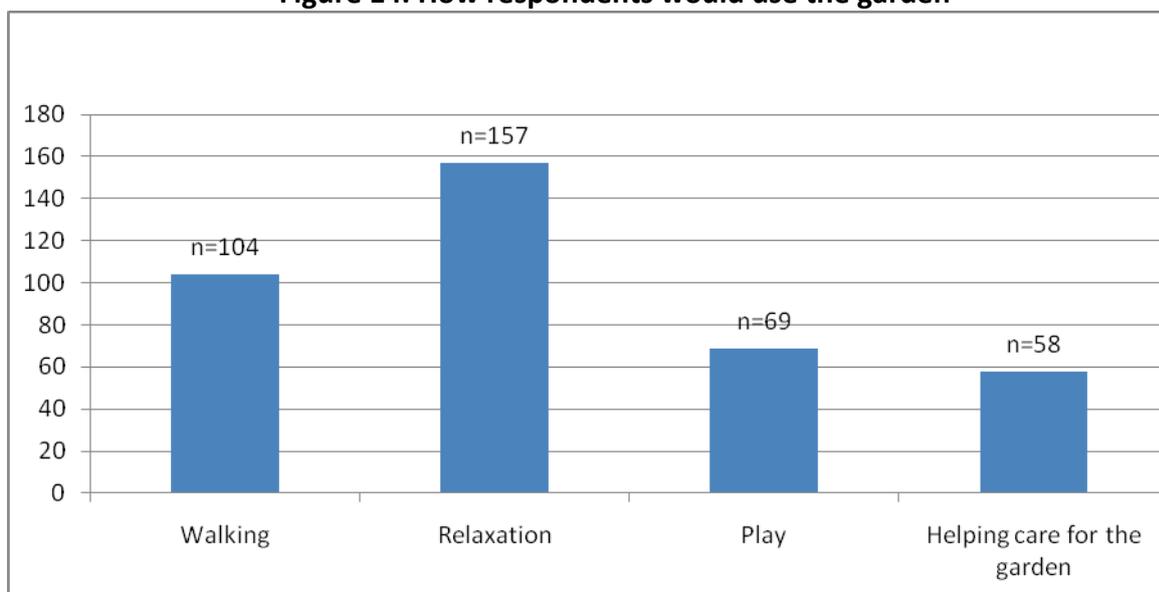
Speaking on behalf of 418 people, visitors fell within the following age groups and the majority (32%) fell within the 60 plus age group.

Figure 13. Ages of Visitors



Respondents described how they would like to use the new garden. Relaxation and walking were the most popular and many (28%) were keen to help care for the garden.

Figure 14. How respondents would use the garden



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Suggested uses for the new garden

Respondents had many other suggestions for how the garden would or could be used. Suggestions included sitting, drawing/painting, meeting other people (particularly relevant for older people and parents with young children). It was seen as an ideal space for community events – music, poetry, theatre - public art, picnics, treasure hunts, nature trails, care of wildlife (bird boxes/feeders etc), and meditation.

Written comments

210: *It's all wonderful – would like there to be activities when it's complete – trail sheets for kids – music, bird-feeding and watching, picnics. Can't wait for it to be finished.*

194: *Community picnics, music, birthday parties, sculptures. Good meeting place for parents and toddlers. Beehives, bat boxes, butterfly and insect boxes.*

145: *I picture this garden as a haven in Totnes – I would like the garden to be a haven for birds and wildlife as well as people – perhaps bird feeders, nesting boxes, bat boxes etc. would help.*

148: *Pool would be good for ceremonies to do with water, like christenings.*

156: *Performance space.*

183: *It might be nice to have an area for community events and larger group gatherings.*

165: *Any entertainments like 'Shakespeare in the Garden' – or similar!*

166: *Bird boxes/Feeding if properly supervised/volunteers.*

139: *Very keen to see public art of a high calibre in site-sensitive, sustainable materials – is there an opportunity for commissions to include site-specific research specification?*

169: *I'm over 80 years old. Just moved to shelter housing, no garden of my own.*

Miss my own garden and flowers, so this will be lovely, and I may meet new people in the herb garden.

188: *Tree climbing/running/treasure hunt/tree house. (Resp aged 9).*

175: *Can anybody visit garden? Can we climb and have picnics? (12 yr old)*

176: *Respondent is primary school teacher (not in Totnes). Wonders if there could be some sheltered area where children can go in school visits if it rains – just a summer thing – gazebo maybe.*