

## Ethnographic Park Study results

### Introduction

Within the context of creating a vision for the future of Urban Parks in Northern Ireland two parks were selected to be the focus of an ethnographic study. The purpose of the study was to compare the public use of two parks and associated attitudes to these urban green spaces. The study included two elements – an observational study of use and conversational style surveys to help uncover what value members of the public placed on these green spaces and their thoughts on future of these spaces. Further interviews were conducted in public areas outside of the park (but within walking distance) to see if views of non-park users could also be gathered.

The two parks selected were Glencairn Park and Valley Park. These parks were selected as they are both in close proximity to high populations, have a number of similarities in landscape features/typography; yet they have had different levels of investment/development over the years. The ability to compare and contrast user levels and opinions was hoped to provide greater insight into what makes a successful park.

Aerial views of the parks are provided in appendix A.

### **Glencairn Park** – Belfast City Council Park.

This 32ha park consists of woodland, river, rough meadows, mown lawns and a playpark.

It seems very little infrastructural investment has been made at the site to date. However, it will be the end point for the new Forth meadow Community Greenway as well as providing a link to current farmed land, recently acquired by National Trust with a view to opening up access to Divis & Black Mountain.



Fig 1&2: Images of Glencairn Park

**Valley Park – Antrim Newtownabbey Borough Council Park.**

This 64ha park consists of woodland, river, pond, rough meadows, mown lawns, playparks, playing pitches, skate park, sculpture trail, dog park. It received almost 5 million euros from Peace III funding in 2015 and the Council has continued to invest in various aspects of the park. A community greenway is planned to go through the park in the near future.



Fig 3&4: Images of Valley Park

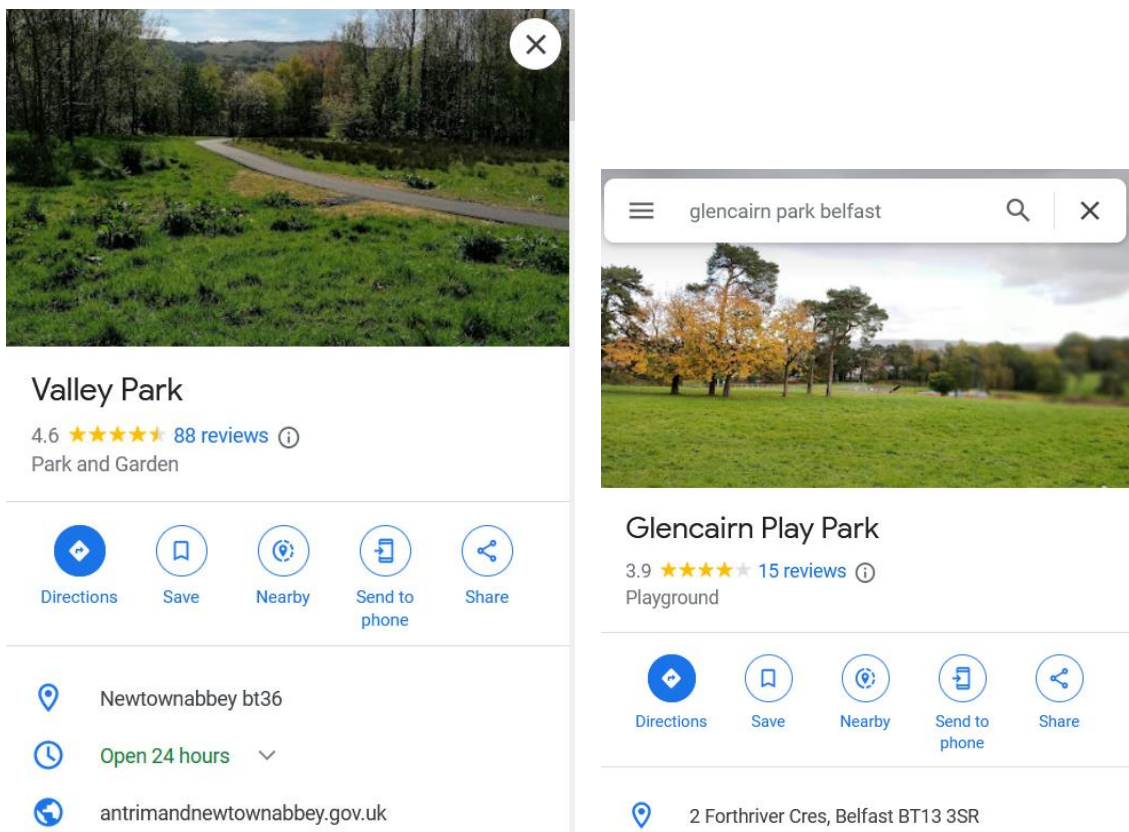


Fig 5&6: Google Review of both parks.

### Observational study

Both parks were visited on three occasions – a weekday during the summer holidays, a weekday during term time and a Saturday. All visits were undertaken on dry, nice/fair weather days between Aug and Oct 2022 to ensure that the study was not adversely affected by the weather.

The following aspects were noted where possible (at times large crowds prevented all details being gathered).

- WHO: Male/Female, age bracket, ethnicity
- WHERE: What areas of the park are used for what?
- WHAT: What activity undertaking? Inactive, light activity, intense activity

Table 1 clearly shows that Valley Park has vastly higher visitor numbers compared with Glencairn Park. This is partly associated with the presence of a large number of pitches within Valley Park which result in both participants and spectators coming to use the site. There was also a Park Run within Valley Park which had 128 runners present on one of the observation days. Glencairn does not have a Park Run or Playing Pitches.

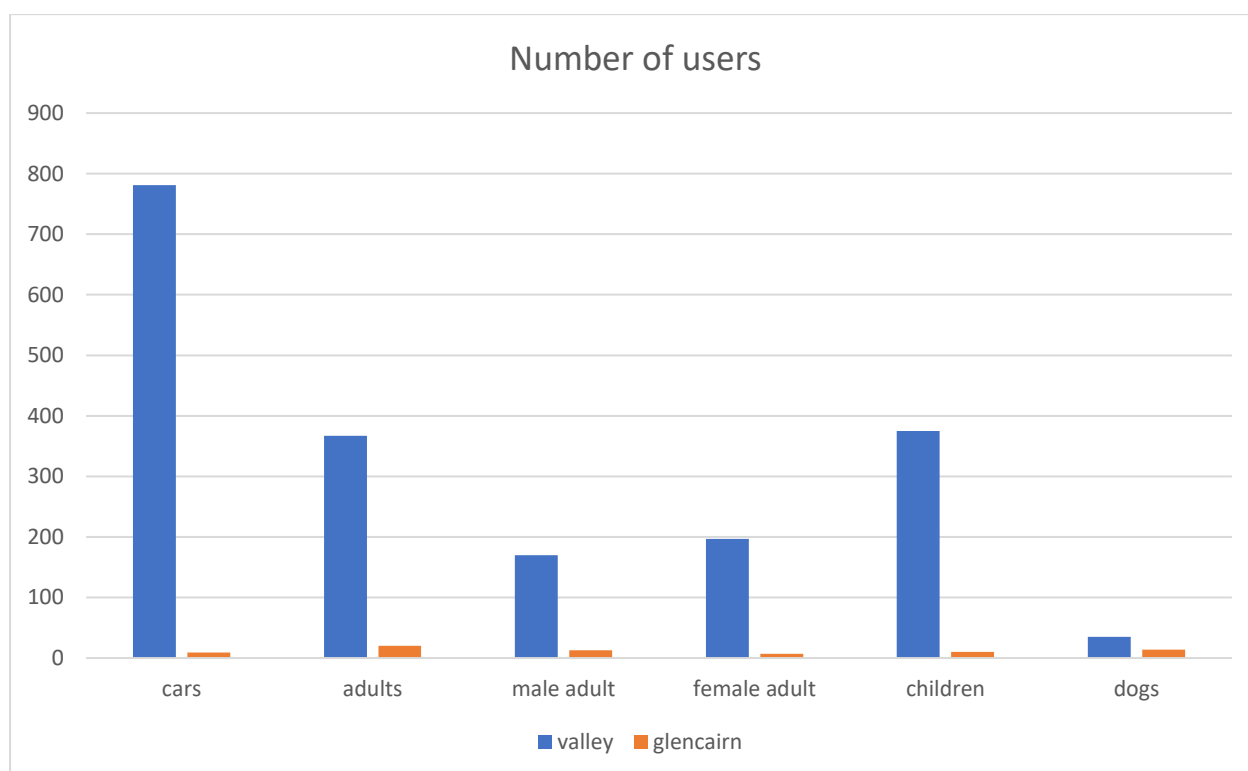


Table 1: Breakdown of users in Valley Park and Glencairn Park

Table 2 shows that the Valley Park is used quite evenly between adults and children. While there are more female than male users. It was observed that there were a number of females walking by themselves around the park.

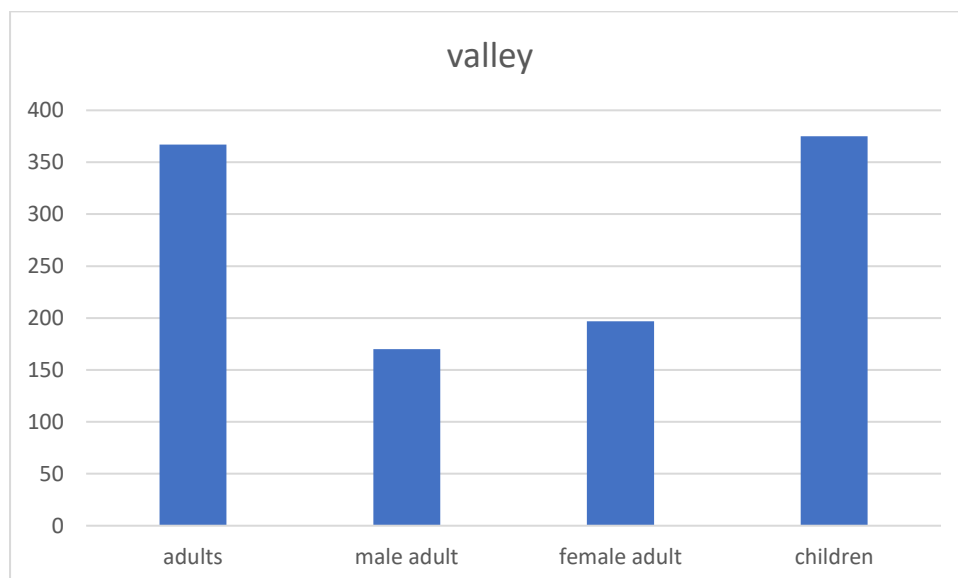


Table 2: Total numbers of users over the 3 observational visits in Valley Park

Table 3 shows that Glencairn park is used mostly by adults, 65% of whom are male. It was observed that most males were there by themselves (often with a dog), while any females there were generally with someone else (either adult or child).

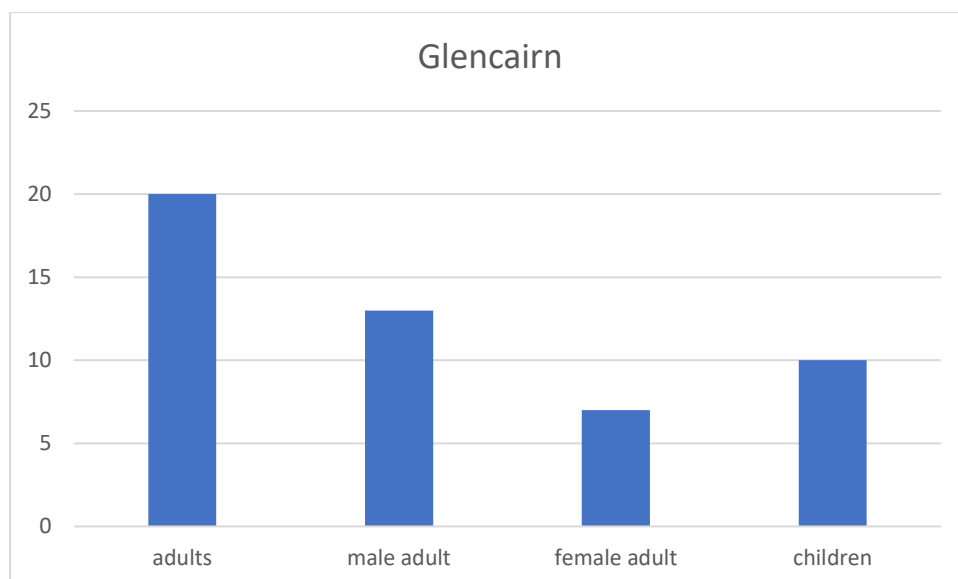


Table 3: Total numbers of users over the 3 observational visits in Glencairn Park



Table 4 shows that intense activity (such as running and playing sports) was only observed at Valley Park. This also resulted in a greater percentage of visitors to the site being inactive, generally because they were watching the sporting activity that was happening.

Most users of Glencairn park were observed undertaking light activity (walking or in play park) with only a few sitting down (smoking or feeding the birds). Talking to park users suggested for many the park was a short cut to access Tesco etc.

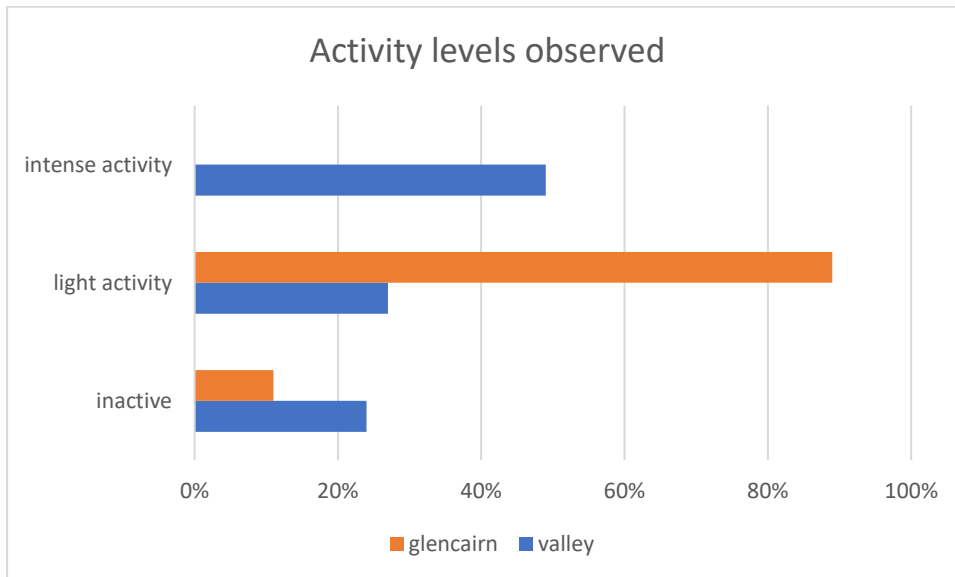


Table 4: Activity levels observed by the users in Glencairn and Valley park

Table 5 shows that a greater percentage of adult users were in the younger age groups in Glencairn Park compared to Valley Park. It should be noted that the age profile of users was only recorded when possible – for large groups within the Valley Park (such as Park Run and spectators at the pitch sports) no attempt was made at estimating the age of users.

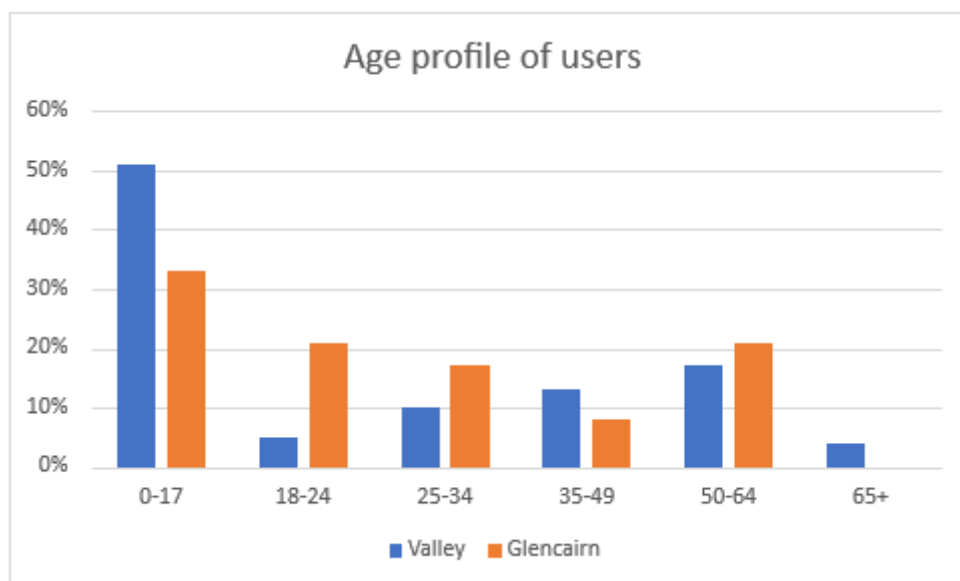


Table 5: Observed age profile of users in Glencairn and Valley park

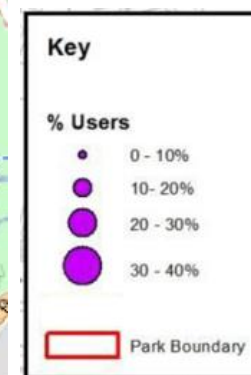
Out of the 742 people observed in the Valley Park over the 3 occasions only five people from an ethnic minority background were observed. None of the 30 people observed in Glencairn Park were from an ethnic minority background.



**Glencairn Park % of users per area over all 3 observational visits.**

Highest site usage is at the children’s play park (24%), followed by the new greenway path (21%).

The mature trees were stated by many of the surveyed users as their favourite part of the park despite there not being a path through the woodland area.

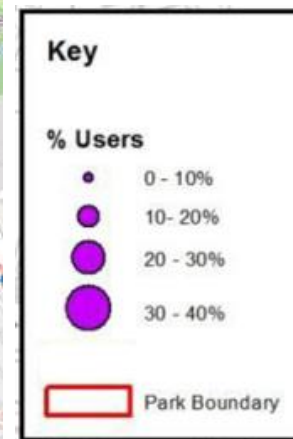




**Valley Park % of users per area over all 3 observational visits.**

Highest site usage is at the 3G pitches (35%), followed by the meeting point for park run (20%) and the children’s play park (12%).

Although the path network around the upper section of the park is generally quiet, it was selected as many surveyed users favourite section because of the peace and quiet, along with the opportunity to feel closer to nature.





## Conversation Survey Results

Surveys were carried out in a conversational manner with details being digitally recorded (written up then deleted) to prevent writing notes being off putting to the flow of conversation. Users within both Parks were mostly happy to stop and answer the survey questions, while the people surveyed outside of the Park boundary were less willing to stop and engage. Generally, those who were prepared to stop and talk did so because they did use the park so had an interest in the topic, making it difficult to get a breadth of knowledges about barriers to Park use.

The general questions asked are provided in Appendix B.

## Valley Park

The key words from the surveys are presented in the word cloud below:



Some Quotes:

**“To me the park is priceless, no amount of money would make me want to stay away. The Council could have sold off the land for social housing, but instead they made the decision to have a park. Having this on your doorstep is priceless”.**

**“It's a great playground to have on our back doors”.**

**“Think our greenspaces should be linked together better, creating long distance walking paths”.**

**“There's a massive space here and I don't think it's been used enough, you know for groups and maybe an outdoor classroom stuff like that”.**

**“I think all green spaces make you feel closer to nature”.**

If you were offered money, each week not to go to the park. How much money would you like?

**“I wouldn't take their money. I think getting the children outside is much more important than money”.**

**“We only have a tiny garden so this is perfect. Also, just to give yourself some time to think”.**

**“Not everyone picks up after their dog which really annoys me”.**

**“I like watching the ducks and feeding the ducks”.**

What makes a successful park?

**“Danger free. That would be the number one and then rubbish free”.**

**“I think it's well kept. Clean and a good variety of things to do”.**

**“It's the openness. Also all the dog walkers. There's a bit of a community, I've gained friendships”.**



**“I’ve reported the problem of scramblers to the police many times”.**

**“I used to walk all the way up the mountain when I was younger”.**

Are there any changes that you'd like to see made?

**“No, it's all good”.**

**“Need to tackle the motorbikes, really bad on Sundays, feels like nothing you can do about it”.**

**“I don't know if it's possible but you need some sort of restriction to the bigger ones because they come in at weekends and drink it and destroy it and set fires. Decent behaviour is really the issue. It has come a long way since I've been here. You know, better walkways and stuff”.**

It should be noted that on the day that the surveys took place in Glencairn Park Council vehicles were observed within the Park on an almost hourly basis – some picking up rubbish, emptying bins or just stopping by. A conversation was had with one of the Park Wardens. He said that the park used to be a real problem area for them, but that it’s now a whole lot better. He was aware that there was still some scrambling and nitros drug use. He said he has noticed that the new path has encouraged more walkers to visit. Positively spoke about assistance from the Belfast Hills Partnership lifting litter etc. from the site.

The Park Warden said he would like to see something happen to the house, as it seems a shame to have it sitting empty. He thinks the managers should be based more locally as opposed to out of Duncree, it might make them more aware of the issues. He feels that more recently staff on the ground are expected to police the parks, but he feels that they would be more of a positive, friendly team, doing things like Park Life.

#### **Non park users:**

Of the people interviewed outside the park sites only 20% of them didn’t use the park at all. Below are a few comments from these people:

What stops you from going? **“If I were to get a dog again it would motivate me. Time is often a barrier. I think for others covid created a mindset of being careful about being around people”.**

**“My daughter's now 16 so no longer wants to go play in the park, is busy with school work”.**

**“Would never go to the park because of various health issues....I’ve a big green area near my house that the housing exec manage and I can see Cave Hill and Carnmoney Hill from some of my house windows. Seeing the green spaces is really important for me, really good for my head space, my mental health. Sometimes I’ve even seen foxes. Yeah, it was amazing”.**

**“I never go to the park now because of old age – I’m not as mobile as I used to be. Also due to covid I’m nervous about leaving the house and being in groups of people unless necessary”.**



### Survey respondents park use and demographic info

Details were also obtained about regularity of park usage, length of visits, transport to get to the site as well as some demographic information which are presented in a series of tables below.

Table 6 indicates that although Glencairn park has fewer users, these users make good use of the park with 90% of people questions being there several times a week if not daily. Table 7 shows that these visits to Glencairn Park may be short (as little as 30mins at times), while those surveyed in Valley Park stayed for at least 1 hour. Table 8 indicates that based on those who were surveyed most visitors to Glencairn arrive on foot (all questioned lived in the local BT13 postcode), while 80% of visitors to Valley Park had arrived by car (and had a wide spread of post codes, including those beyond the local council area). It may be speculated that the longer it takes you to get to a site, the longer you are likely to stay to make the travel worthwhile.

Reflecting the observational findings – more men took part in the survey in Glencairn Park compared to Valley Park (Table 9). The largest age group that took part in the surveys was the 50-64 years group – probably due to the fact that the surveys were carried out during the working week when many younger adults are working (Table 10). Finally, Table 11 shows that over 50% of people questioned had a dog, which for a lot of people was their main motivation to go to the park.

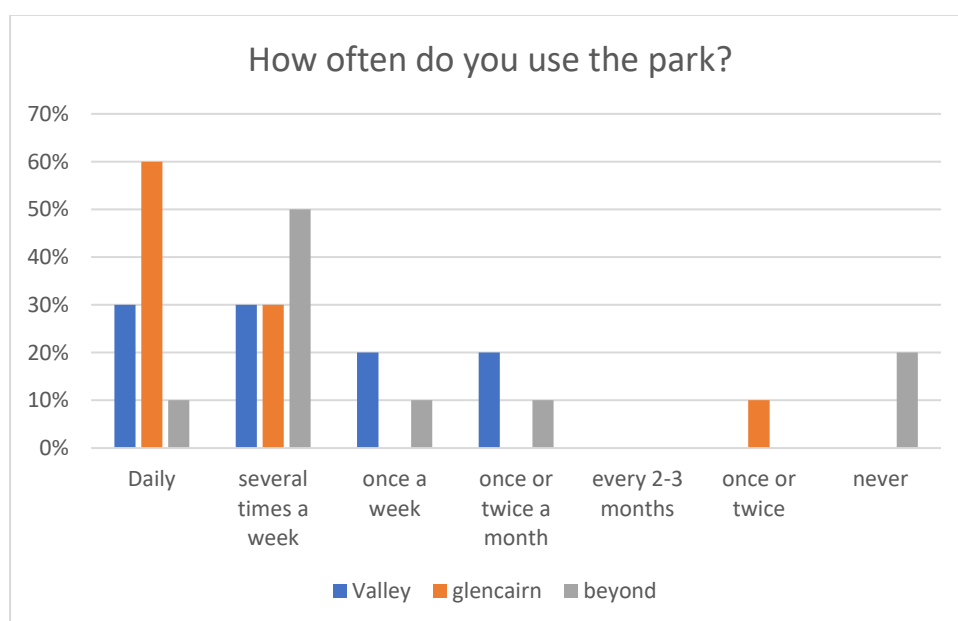


Table 6: Regularity of park usage by people surveyed in Valley Park, Glencairn Park and ‘beyond’ i.e. outside the park

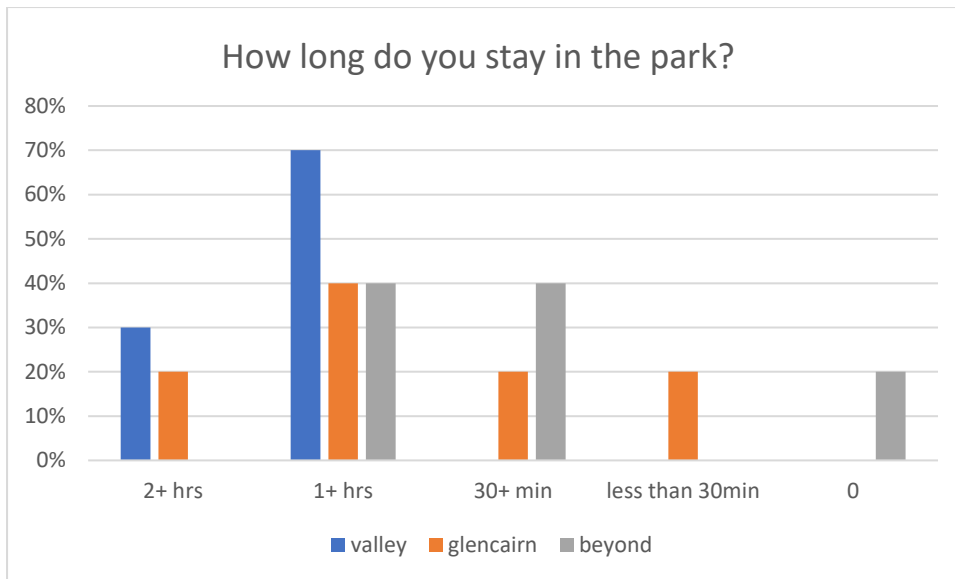


Table 7: Time spent in the park by people surveyed in Valley Park, Glencairn Park and ‘beyond’ i.e. outside the park

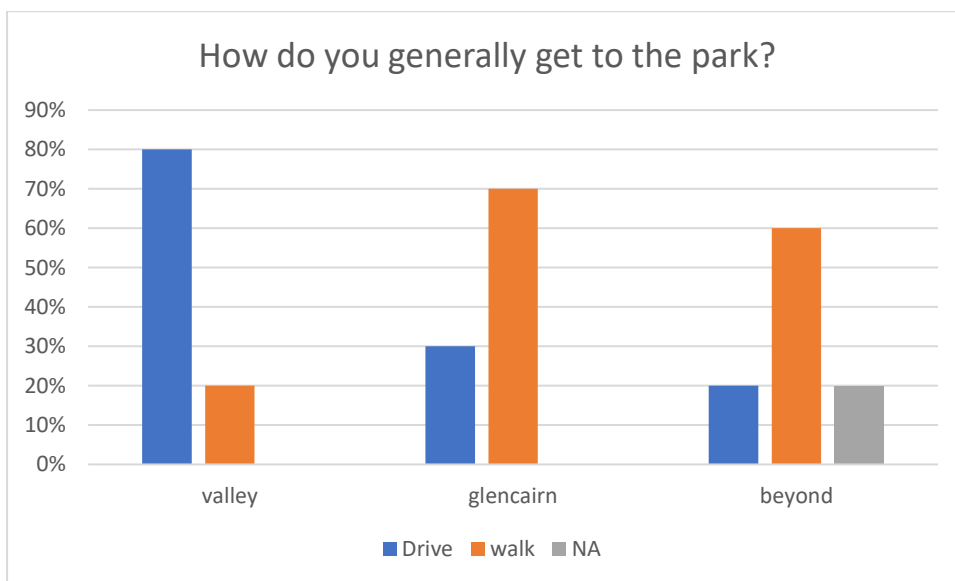


Table 8: How people surveyed in Valley Park, Glencairn Park and ‘beyond’ i.e. outside the park generally get to the park

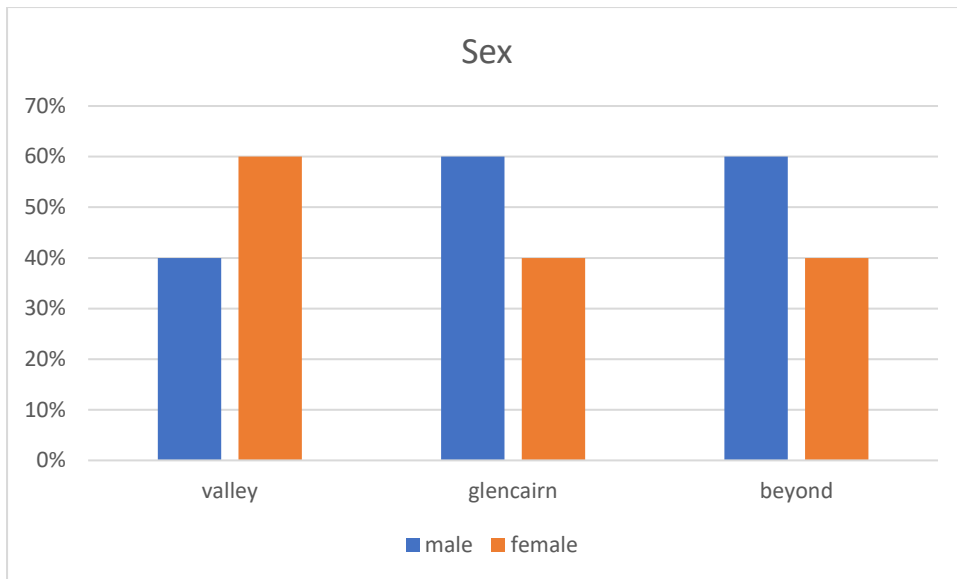


Table 9: Sex of people surveyed in Valley Park, Glencairn Park and 'beyond' i.e. outside the park

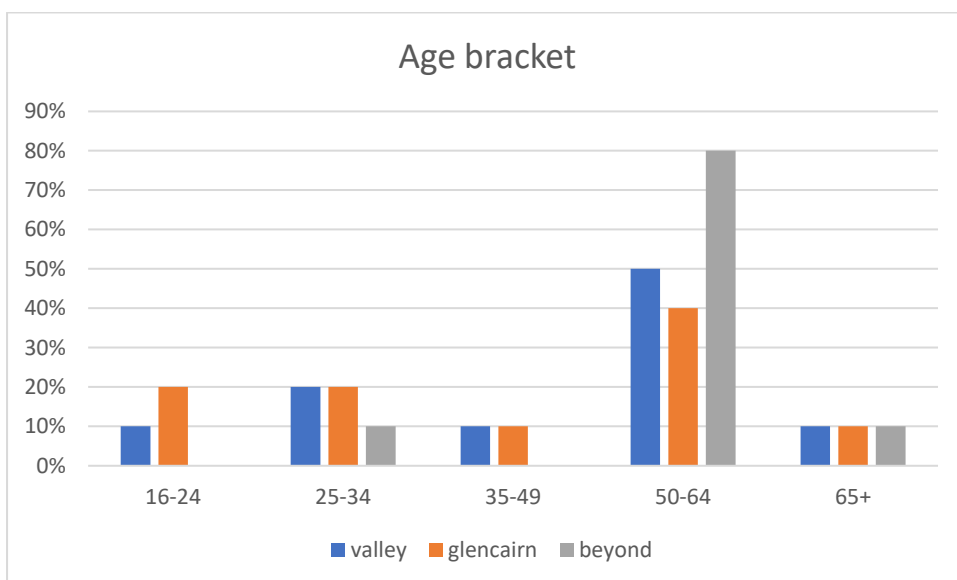


Table 10: Age bracket of people surveyed in Valley Park, Glencairn Park and 'beyond' i.e. outside the park

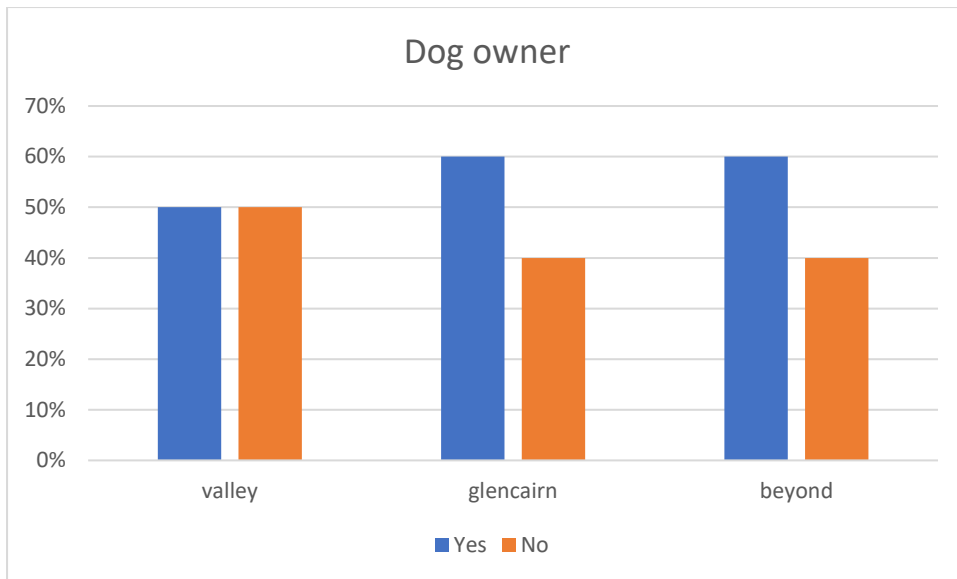


Table 11: Dog ownership of people surveyed in Valley Park, Glencairn Park and 'beyond' i.e. outside the park



## Appendix A

### Glencairn Park Aerial View



### Valley Park Aerial View



## Appendix B

### Informal survey questions

- Do you ever visit the Valley/Glencairn Park?

If yes:

- How often do you go to the park?
- Do you stay for long?
- Do you generally walk or drive to get here?
- What makes a successful park?
- What positive changes would you like to see in the park over the next 10 years?
- Do you have a favourite part of the park?
- How can the council team who look after the park communicate more effectively to you about the park?
- If you were offered money each week to not go to the park, how much money would you need to be offered before you would go elsewhere? Where would you go?
- Would you like to make any other comments?
- Post code

If no:

- What stops you going to the park?/ What would help you visit more often?
- What makes a successful park?
- What positive changes would you like to see in the park over the next 10 years?
- How can the council team who look after the park communicate more effectively to you about the park?
- Where do you generally go to relax instead of the park?
- Post code