

## **The Future of Urban Green Spaces, 'My Place' Engagement Sessions**

As part of the Future of Urban Green Spaces research project, six community and youth 'My Place' engagement sessions were undertaken during November and December 2022. This enabled a more in depth focus on people's experience of four parks located across the region in three different council areas.

- Ballymoney Riverside Park, Causeway Coast and Glens Borough Council
- Dungannon Park and Railway Park, Mid Ulster District Council
- V36, Valley Park, Antrim and Newtownabbey Borough Council



*Mapping from Google Earth showing the Urban Green Spaces associated with the 'My Place' Engagement Sessions*

### **Riverside Park**

Address: 8 Armour Avenue, Ballymoney, Co Antrim

Council Area: Causeway Coast and Glens

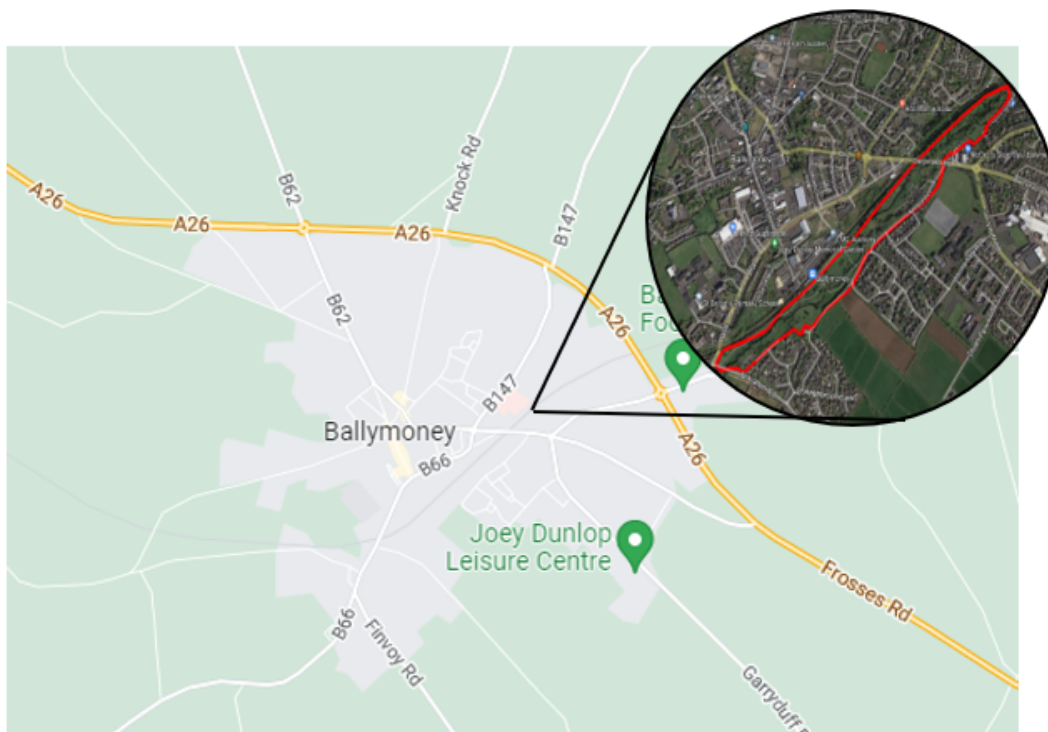
Riverside Park is a 40-acre park, located in the heart of Ballymoney, accessed at 8 Armour Avenue. The Ballymoney River runs through the middle of the park making it a haven for wildlife within the Causeway Coast and Glens Borough Council area.

The park benefits from a range of walks through both open parkland and woodland. Other facilities within the park include the Jubilee play park, picnic areas, a pavilion building and educational information boards. There are two car parking facilities, one at Bravallen Road and Armour Avenue, active transport is also key with a shared cycle path also running through the park, which forms part of the NCN Route 96 from Lough Neagh via Ballymoney to Coleraine.

In 2015 Riverside Park was designated a Local Nature Reserve (LNR) endorsed by the Council for Nature Conservation and the Countryside. At this time the former duck pond, was infilled to create a wetland floodplain, with the use of specialist biodiversity planting. A new river channel was engineered to support the native fish population, including Atlantic salmon. The woodland areas within the park were also enhanced with native planting such as, wild garlic, bluebells, snowdrops, miniature daffodils, honeysuckle.



*Images of Riverside Park. Credit: discovernorthernireland.com*



*Location of Riverside Park. Credit: Google Maps*



## **Dungannon Park**

Address: 8 Ballynorthland Demesne, Moy Road, Dungannon, Co Tyrone

Council Area: Mid Ulster District Council

Located 2 miles from the centre of Dungannon at 8 Ballynorthland Demesne, Moy Road, within Mid Ulster District Council. The park is well sign posted on entering Dungannon from the M1 Motorway. The park itself is set over 70 acres and includes traditional open green spaces, athletic pitches, forested areas, with a waterfall and large lake used for trout fishing. There are a wide range of facilities within the park including a children's play area, walking paths, caravan park, trout fishery, tennis courts, football and cricket pitches, barbeque site and a visitor centre with toilets, laundry, kitchen facilities and TV lounge. The park also benefits from an allotment located on Nunnery Hill, in addition to a small orchard and herb gardens. Mid Ulster District Council regularly update the park's Facebook page to advise residents of activities in the park. Dungannon Park was a recipient of a 2022 Green Flag Award.



*Image showing Dungannon Park  
Credit: Facebook*



*Image showing bandstand at Dungannon Park Credit:  
Discover Northern Ireland*



Location of Dungannon Park. Credit: Google Maps

## Railway Park

Address: Railway Road, Dungannon, Co Tyrone

Council Area: Mid Ulster District Council

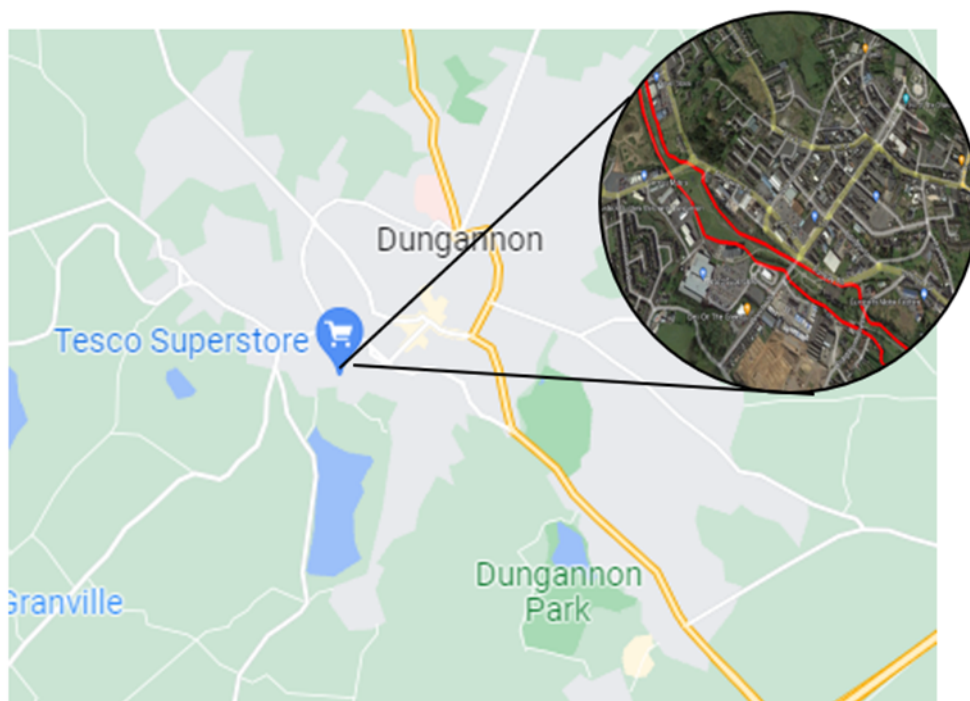
Railway Park runs adjacent to Railway Road, Dungannon and traces the former railway line north to Lisnahull Road. Located within the Mid Ulster District Council area, the Park provides a linear pathway within the west of Dungannon. A small children's play park is located at the Ballygawley Road, with car parking available at the Railway Road entrance. The park is well lit, providing a safe route through the town at all times of the day. Mid Ulster District Council's Our Public Parks and Play Five Year Strategic Plan 2020 – 2025 carried out an in-depth study into current provision, resulting in a series of recommendations which includes a £150,000 upgrade and relocation for Railway Park.



Railway Park, showing the old commercial platform. Credit: Community Places



Railway Park, showing the children's Play Park. Credit: Community Places



*Location of Railway Park. Credit: Google Maps*

### **V36, Valley Park**

Address: Church Road, Newtownabbey, Co Antrim.

Council Area: Antrim and Newtownabbey Borough Council

V36 is located within the wider Valley Park, which is accessed via Church Road, Newtownabbey. Valley Park benefits from additional accesses on Church Road (beside the Valley Leisure Centre) and the O'Neill Road. Situated in Antrim and Newtownabbey Borough Council, V36 provides the following facilities: a full size floodlit third generation pitch suitable for football, rugby and Gaelic sports, a civic linear park including event spaces, open space, scenic walking routes and installations of both public and community art, a unique children's adventure play area, which includes a wheelchair accessible swing, Skate 100 a 14,000 square-foot skate park and picnic area. The wider Valley Park is home to walking and running trails, which host a weekly Park Run event, a duck pond with viewing deck and a self-contained dog park with areas for large and small dogs, including a full range of agility equipment and water taps.

Valley Park and V36 has received investment of £4.33 million funding under the EU PEACE III and IV Programmes.





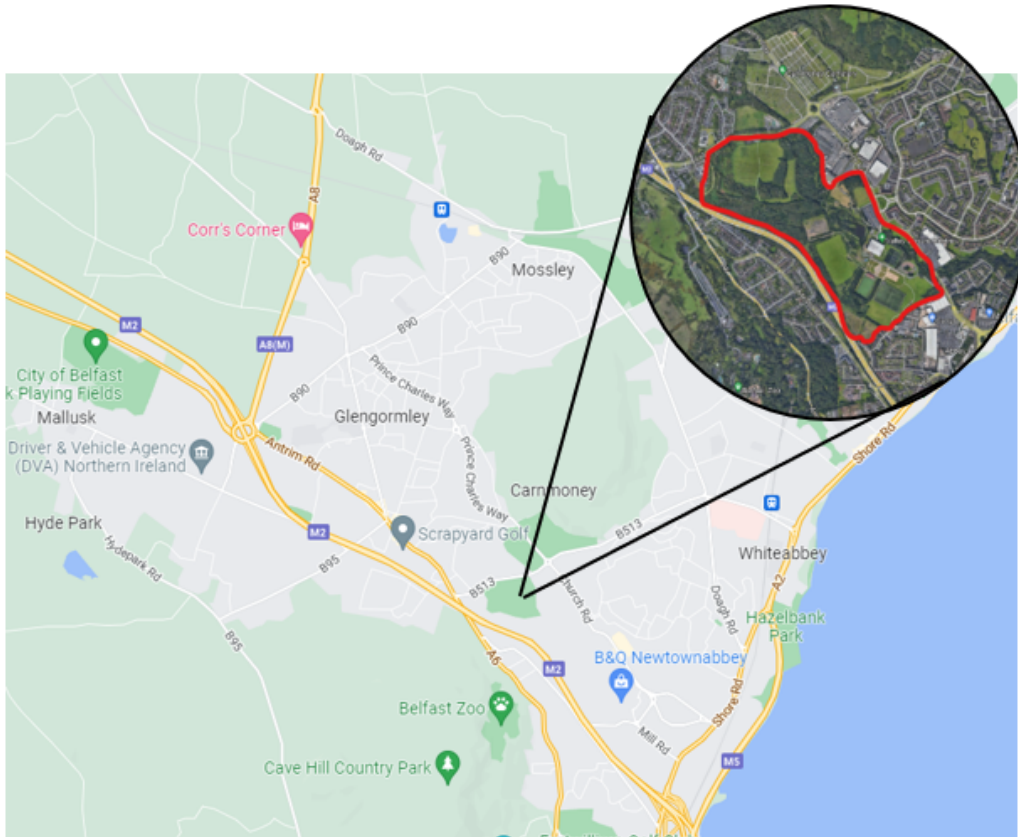
Play Park at V36. Credit: [visitantrimandnewtownabbey.com](http://visitantrimandnewtownabbey.com)



Park Run at Valley Park. Credit: [Parkrun.com](http://Parkrun.com)



Accessible Swing in V36. Credit: [www.accessable.co.uk/](http://www.accessable.co.uk/)



Location of V36, Valley Park. Credit: Google Maps

## 'My Place' Engagement Sessions

Community and youth representatives from the following groups, secondary and primary schools were invited to participate and share their comments and ideas on the future of urban green spaces:

- Ballymoney Friendship and Walking Group
- Willowbank Community, The Junction, Dungannon
- Newtownabbey Arts and Cultural Network
- Ballymoney High School
- St Patrick's College, Dungannon
- Rathcoole Primary School

At each session the 'My Place' participatory card game was utilised to generate conversation and to encourage participants to consider both the positive and negative aspects of the parks. The game is an accessible and creative way of supporting people to consider what is important to them about urban green spaces and to think about the quality of these spaces.

Each group was asked to discuss and rate the associated park against 14 place criteria:

- Affordable
- Public Transport
- Feeling Safe
- Shops and Facilities
- Things to do
- Free Wi-Fi
- Friends
- Shelter
- Crowding
- Appearance
- Health and Wellbeing
- Nature
- Family
- Diversity

Participants then discussed and advanced suggestions as to how these spaces could be improved and enhanced, and agreed and prioritised key improvements. In total, 86 participants took part in the 'My Place' engagement sessions.



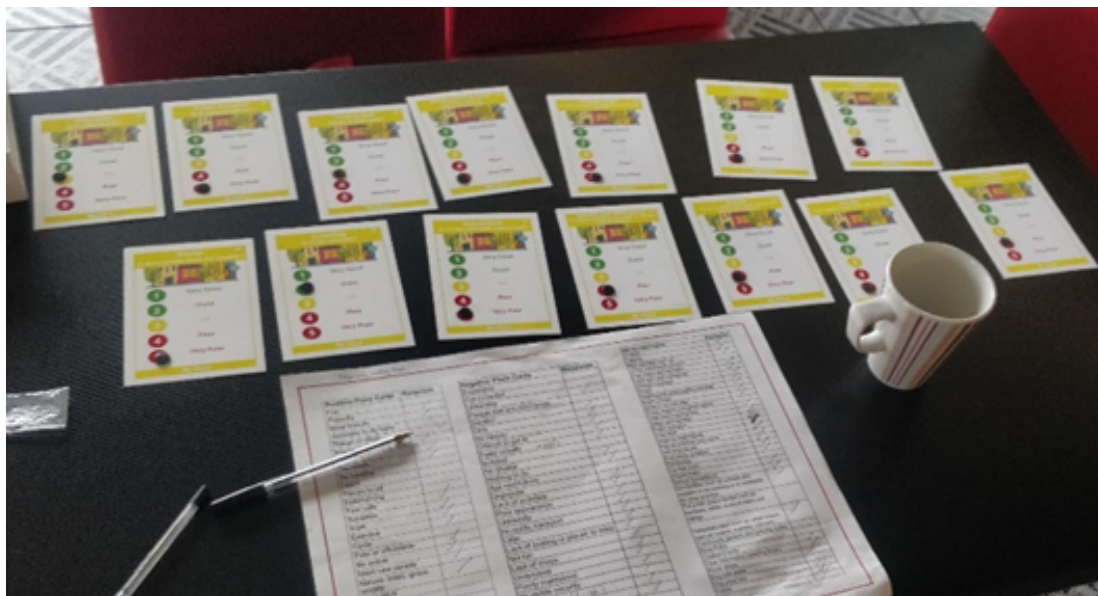
*'My Place' Participatory Card Game: Positive, Negative and Criteria and Rating Cards*







Participants rated the park from 1 (Very good with little room for improvement) to 5 (Very Poor with a lot of room for improvement) against 14 place criteria. Across the four groupings those that rated a 4 or 5 included: Shops and Facilities (4/5); Free Wi-fi (5); Shelter (4/5) and Appearance (4/5).



#### *My Place Criteria Rating*

Several suggestions as to how the park could be improved were noted including providing additional seating, shelter, more activities, keep it clean and well maintained, include more litter and recycling bins, shops and facilities such as a café, free wi-fi, safer areas to meet with friends such as picnic tables, free family activities, outdoor events, more dog foul bins and accessible toilets. Participants then discussed and prioritised the improvements they would like to see. Across the four groups these included:

Seating: Include more benches to sit around different areas of the park.

Shelter: to provide protection from wet and cold weather.

Dog foul bins: not enough provision for dog foul bins around the park.

Clean and well maintained: Clean up and clear walking paths (leaves, litter, and dog fouling) and provide additional litter and recycling facilities.

Shop, coffee pod or café: provision of a café with toilet facilities and baby changing facilities.

Free family events: programme of free seasonal events and pop-up activities that suit all ages.

Planting/ Flowers: increase planting/floral areas within the park to improve appearance.

Free Wi-fi: to make it easier to contact family (to let them know where they are) and meet up with friends.

More sports activity/play equipment: provision of a mountain bike track and more play equipment in play park.

Security: Surveillance to prevent antisocial behaviour and drinking in park.

Dog safe areas: contained areas of the park where dogs can roam off lead.

See Appendix 1: Report Cards for full details.

### **Dungannon Park and Railway Park**

Year 8 students from St Patrick's College, Dungannon played the 'My Place' card game in three groups, the students were asked if they would like to play the game using Dungannon Park or Railway Park, as all students indicated that they use or have used Dungannon Park, it was chosen. The groups then considered cards that reflected the positive characteristics of the park, noting that Dungannon Park is a space that is used to meet up with friends, where they can exercise and have fun. All students highlighted that the park provided them with an area to both relax and have fun amongst nature, with some noting the colourful flora displays and others focusing on the large green areas to run and play football. All participants commented that the park was free or affordable.

In respect of the negative characteristics of the park all students noted the lack of a shop within the park, the groups reflected on the loss of the café which was missed. Each group then noted differing negative aspects. Two groups noted the park was difficult to get to, that there was no public transport and litter in the park, although it was noted this is picked up quickly. Others noted the lack of activities within the park, some students advised they would like more play equipment, football, basketball, outdoor gym, trampolines, others within the group disagreed and felt there were adequate activities. It was noted that there is a perceived 'unfriendliness' of the park, with one student shared that a dog had attempted to bite them on one occasion.



*Participants from St Patrick's College, Dungannon*

Students were asked to rank the park against 14 place criteria, ranking was ordered: (1) Very Good to (5) Very Poor. All students ranked the Nature Value of the Park as (1) Very good. Other place criteria that were ranked with a value of (1) Very Good or (2) Good were, Friends, Appearance, Family and Diversity. The most poorly performing criteria was Free Wi-Fi, with all groups providing a ranking of (5) Very Poor, similarly shops and facilities was afforded a ranking of Poor/Very Poor (5/4/4),



with students noting that since the café closed, there was no where they could avail of free Wi-Fi in the park. Please see Appendix 1 for the full Report Card details.

Suggested improvements to Dungannon Park included the introduction of more litter and recycling bins, with a special emphasis on recycling bins and dog foul bins. All three groups felt there should be an increase in the number of free family activities held within the park. The students were asked to prioritise their suggested improvements, across the groups the top improvements included:

**Café/Food Outlets:** since the closure of the café, participants felt that there was no where they could get a drink or ice cream on a warm day.

**Toilets:** students felt that there was a lack of toilet facilities within the park.

**Lighting:** students felt that there should be an increased level of lighting to allow them to continue to use the park during the darker months.

**More Activities:** as outlined above students want more free family and seasonal activities within the park.

**Pocket parks:** including a dog park/dog safe areas, there was also a request to introduce more dog foul bins to help resolve the dog poop issue.

**More Play equipment** including natural play such as swings in trees.

**Shelter:** from poor weather.

**Free Wi-Fi:** students noted that since the café closed there was no Wi-Fi available.

**Clean and Well-Maintained:** keeping the Park well presented.

Participants from the Willowbank Community, a not-for-profit organisation that provides day opportunities, training and support for adults with a physical disability and/or a sensory impairment played the 'My Place' card game. The participants chose to discuss Railway Park in Dungannon, given the groups location immediately adjacent to the park. The participants highlighted they felt the park was fun, they felt safe to walk and exercise in the park, especially given the flat even pathways which were accessible for wheelchairs. Participants also highlighted that the park was easy to get to from their location in The Junction, adjacent to the park. They noted that the park is clean and well maintained, with areas of nature and in close proximity to local shops and services.

Participants discussed the negative features of the park, noting that in warmer summer months there were instances of anti-social behaviour with people drinking in the park, this would often result in litter and broken glass. Participants also shared that there is a lack of activities in the park and expressed an interest in having more seasonal activities to animate the space. The group highlighted that the positioning of the seating benches didn't take advantage of the outlook of the park, the limited seating available was directed away from the open green space and towards fencing. It was stressed that there was inadequate space for wheelchair users to sit alongside the existing benches, participants expressed concerns that wheel-chairs protruded onto and blocked the pathway for other park users. A lack of shelter and accessible toilet and changing facilities was also highlighted as negative aspects of park provision. Participants felt that the existing play park was underused, primarily

due to its location, they expressed an interest in having the play park moved closer to the Junction building, where parents and guardians could access it better.

Participants were asked to discuss and rank the park using 14 place criteria, ranking was ordered: (1) Very Good to (5) Very Poor. Railway Park attained a Very Good (1) ranking for Family, Affordability and Public Transport. By contrast the park attained a Very Poor (5) ranking for the following criteria, Free Wi-Fi and Shelter. Please see Appendix 1 for the full Report Card details.



*Participants from Willowbank Community, Dungannon discussing Railway Park*

The participants suggested a number of improvements for Railway Park, which included seating, shelter, picnic benches and places to meet friends. Other improvements included the provision of seasonal activities such as Christmas and craft markets, bright colours and seasonal planting. Welcome signage was also suggested, as was the provision of accessible toilets, accessible seating and a community garden with raised beds making gardening and growing accessible for all. Participants were facilitated to discuss and prioritise their suggested improvements.

Accessible seating: including places to relax and meet friends, such as picnic tables it was felt this would draw more users into the park.

Toilets: which should be fully accessible.

Events and Seasonal Activities: including a Christmas tree, local bands and music in the summer.

Shelter: to provide cover during inclement weather.

Trees, flowers and green space: this could be achieved through a community garden and would add colour and vibrancy to the area.

Dog Fouling bins with dog bags included, this would help maintain the cleanliness of the park.

### **V36, Valley Park**

Participants from Newtownabbey Arts and Cultural Network and Rathcoole Primary School played the 'My Place' card game in three groups. All of the groups chose cards that highlighted the Valley Park as a fun place, where you can meet friends, that there are lots of activities on offer, access to nature including trees, grass and wildlife and areas to de-stress and relax which it was noted is good for mental health and well-being. The community participants highlighted the affordability of the park

and that it is a space which is welcoming, where you can meet new people, be active and healthy.



*Participants from Rathcoole Primary School and Newtownabbey Arts and Cultural Network*

In terms of the negative aspects each of the groups noted that the park can become too crowded, especially in the summertime; that there are no areas of shelter, nothing to do for teens, lack of shops, no visible security and anti-social behaviour in the evenings and weekends which puts people off going to the park.

Participants rated the park from 1 (Very good with little room for improvement) to 5 (Very Poor with a lot of room for improvement) against 14 place criteria. Across the three groupings those that rated a 4 or 5 included: Feeling Safe (4); Public Transport (4); Free Wi-fi (4/5); Shops and Facilities (4); Shelter (4/5); Crowding (4) and Appearance.

Several suggestions as to how the park could be improved were noted including, visible and friendly security, free events and activities, better cleanliness and maintenance, additional litter, and recycling bins, free wi-fi and a café. Participants then discussed and prioritised the improvements they would like to see. Across the three groups these included:

**Shelter:** to provide protection from wet and cold weather. It was noted that charging points for phones could also be incorporated into shelter areas.

**Clean and well maintained:** with additional litter and recycling facilities.



**Free family Activities:** programme of free seasonal events and pop-up activities such as an outdoor cinema or public pianos to animate the space. It was suggested by the pupils from Rathcoole Primary School that skate equipment such as helmets and safety pads should be available to rent to reduce costs, make the space more accessible and to ensure safety. Additional family car parking spaces would also be welcomed.

**Shop or café:** to cater for different age groups and could include a cyber or gaming café and meeting space.

**Lighting:** to improve perceptions of safety at night-time.

**Security:** visible staff or warden presence in the park.

**Public Transport:** better bus connections, or even a new train halt.

**Free Wi-fi:** including areas for charging points and infrastructure to support outdoor performances and busking.

**Bigger Play Park:** incorporating nature themed trails. See Appendix 1: Report Cards for full details.

### **Future use of parks and green spaces**

At the end of each engagement session participants were invited to share their comments on: What would make you want to use parks and green spaces in the future?

