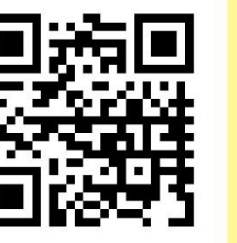


# The Leeds Parks Project



## Historical analysis

The historical analysis comprises three parts:

- Acquisition period: We used digitised newspaper collections and archival material to explore the acquisition and early life of each case-study park, covering three years before and after their opening.
- Newspaper sample: Using British Newspapers Online, we ran keyword searches for each park to explore social uses and experiences following acquisition, up until 1914.
- Archival research: We visited West Yorkshire Archive Service and the British Library, piecing together the social history of each park using municipal records, maps and pamphlets.

This approach helped us to understand the processes by which parks in Leeds were acquired, and everyday experiences of parks as spaces of social mixing in the nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries.

## About the Research

There are more than 27,000 parks and green spaces across the UK. In Leeds, there are 7 major parks and 62 community parks.

Our research explores the social role and purpose of urban public parks both at the time of their foundation in the Victorian era and today.

Our aim is to understand everyday experiences and future expectations of parks in Leeds to sustain and support them in the life of the city.

This project combines **historical analysis** of the park movement with a **contemporary study** of park life.

Our research provides a broad analysis of parks across Leeds, and in-depth research into three **case-study parks**: Woodhouse Moor, Roundhay Park and Cross Flatts Park.

## Contemporary study

The contemporary study comprises four parts:

- Leeds parks survey: 6,432 people responded to our citywide public survey which ran from June to November 2016.
- Adult parks users: Interviews with 60 adult residents explored how our case-study parks are used, valued and managed as well as hopes and fears for the future.
- Young people's views: 9 focus groups with young people explored what they like and dislike about parks, how they use them and what they would like to change or improve.
- Park governance: Interviews with park managers, friends groups and various city services explored the vision, management, regulation and upkeep of Leeds parks as well as expectations for their future.

## New Photographic Archive of Leeds Parks

We have curated a digital archive of images of parks over time, using photographs submitted by members of the public and Leeds Parks and Countryside.

The collection is hosted by the Leeds Library and Information Service and is accessible via the Leodis website: [www.leodis.net](http://www.leodis.net)

## Case-Study Parks

In-depth research on three parks in Leeds, each of which was originally opened for public use during the Victorian era: Woodhouse Moor, Roundhay Park and Cross Flatts Park.

These parks draws out the diverse:

- Social ideals and purposes of parks
- Scale and social profile of users
- Experiences of park life, from the ceremonial through to the informal

Image reproduced courtesy of Leeds Parks and Countryside

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# The Birth of the Park Movement in Victorian Britain



## Parliamentary origins

Concerns about the shortage of urban green space led to the formation of the Select Committee on Public Walks in the 1830s. Their report called for the provision of further public parks to promote public health and orderly conduct. Given these public benefits, the Committee argued that providing parks was 'a duty of the Government'.

This report helped to kick-start the park movement, as local authorities and wealthy individuals increasingly sought to provide parks for the people.

By the 1850s, public parks had become a characteristic feature of Victorian social reform. Hence, it was fitting that London's **Hyde Park** was used to host the Great Exhibition, a major celebration of social and commercial progress, in 1851.



The Great Exhibition at the Crystal Palace in Hyde Park, London (1851)

## Parks for the People

By the early nineteenth century, there were a limited number of urban green spaces, such as royal parks, common and waste lands, botanical gardens and cemeteries. With the growth of cities and enclosure of common lands, there was increasing public concern regarding the shortage of **open spaces**, especially for working-class city-dwellers.

***'Whilst the Wealth, Importance and Population of [large] Towns have augmented...no adequate provision has been made for Public Walks, or any reservations of Open Spaces, giving facilities for future improvement.'*** (Select Committee on Public Walks 1833)

By the 1840s, a major movement was underway to provide 'people's parks' in towns and cities. Unlike many existing green spaces, these would be freely accessible to the public throughout the year, and adorned with paths, gardens and recreational facilities. By the late nineteenth century, along with seaside holidays and organised sports, park-visiting had emerged as a major part of popular culture.

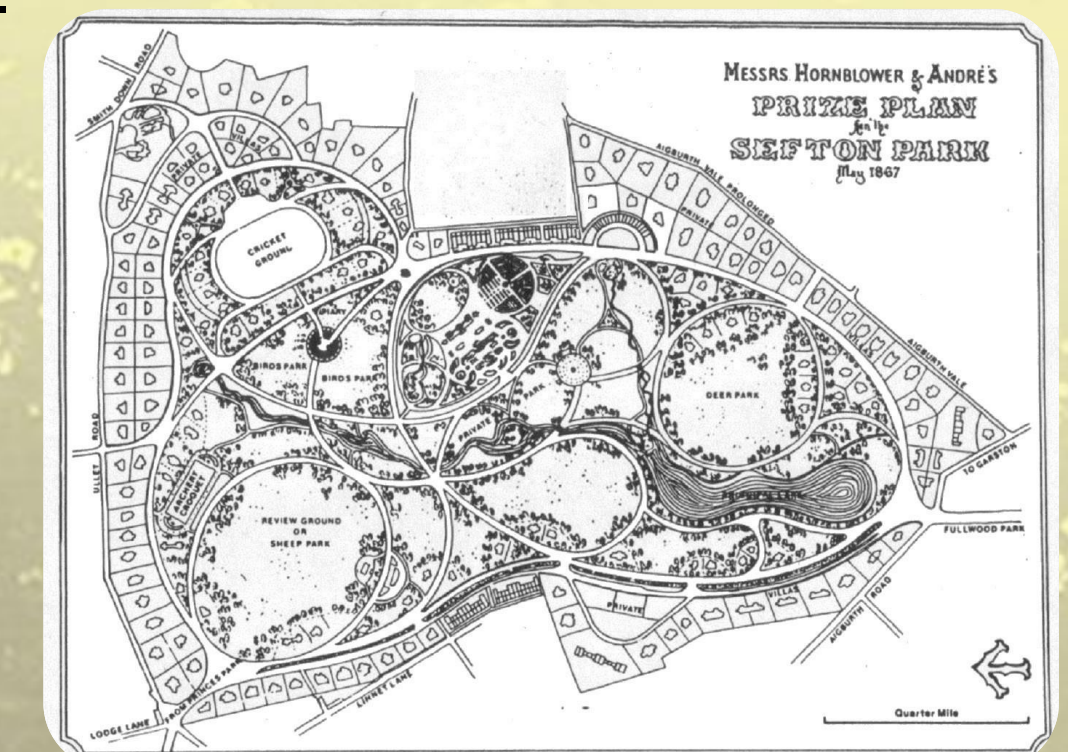
## Victorian progress

In the early Victorian period, slow progress was made in providing public parks. Though major parks opened in several towns in the 1840s, cities such as Leeds had yet to join the park movement.

The pace of change quickened from the 1850s. Often at considerable expense, local authorities seized the opportunity to purchase lands for public recreation, and thus safeguard parts of their towns and cities from future development.

Over time, local authorities paid increasing attention to park design. One influential model was the elliptical layout of **Sefton Park** in Liverpool, which designated specific parts of the park for different uses..

By the turn of the twentieth century, park management was a major duty of local government. In Leeds, the Council managed over 20 parks and recreation grounds by 1910.



Plan for Sefton Park, Liverpool (1867)



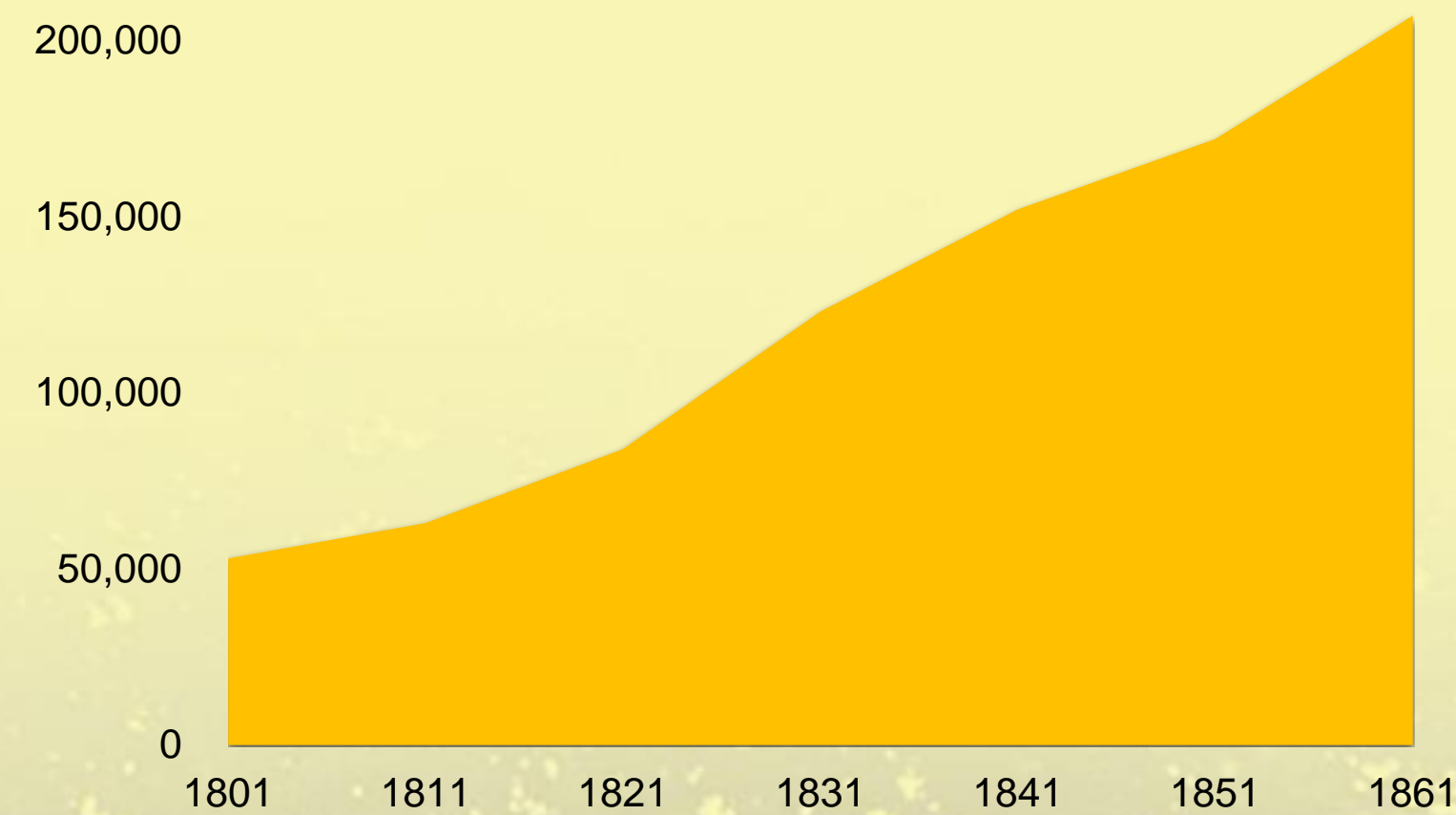


# Industrial Leeds and the Struggle for Green Space



## A booming industrial city

The early nineteenth century witnessed a tremendous expansion in urban industry. In Leeds, the major industries were woollen textiles, engineering, metalworking, clothing and chemicals. Mechanisation gathered pace from the 1820s, leading to the construction of large textile mills. The acceleration of industry fuelled rapid population growth.



Urban and industrial growth brought with it a host of social and environmental problems. In particular, residents worried that new, polluting industries posed a major threat to public health. These concerns fed into the campaign to acquire public parks as green spaces of 'healthful recreation'.

## Parks for a Developing City

The park movement in Leeds emerged out of the growth of the growth of the city and its industrial base. Pollution and overcrowding worsened, while at the same time the enclosure of formerly common lands threatened many existing green spaces on the outskirts of town.

In this context, public figures called for parks to help improve living conditions and preserve public access to green space. Parks in the city were often referred to as '**the lungs of Leeds**', as it was expected they would improve public health by supplying fresh air and ensuring against over-development. Social reformers also hoped parks would promote **social mixing**, in a city segregated along lines of social class.

Parks were integral to idealised visions of an improved future city, and became in time prominent symbols of Victorian civic pride.

### The Lungs of Leeds

'Provide for [the people] means of rational recreation, such as public gardens and promenades, where they may be able, after ten or more hours' work in a stifling atmosphere, to breathe freely Heaven's genial, bracing, unadulterated air'

(Leeds Times 1854)

### Social Mixing

'The great toiling hive of Leeds, will highly appreciate...the pleasure of associating with those other classes of society with which they only occasionally come in contact.'

(Leeds Times 1856, on Sunday afternoon concerts in public parks)

## Common lands under threat

Even as the city grew, there remained large areas of common land, especially in the suburbs and out-townships. However, a flurry of enclosure acts between the 1780s and 1830s concentrated landownership in the hands of a wealthy few, and left the former common lands ripe for development.

By the mid-nineteenth century, the loss of common lands injected a sense of urgency to the search for green space, as urban development continued apace.

*'Opportunities still exist, but are rapidly passing away, for securing open spaces for the health and recreation of the inhabitants.'* (James Hole, social reformer, 1866)



Cramped and insanitary court housing in central Leeds, resulting from mass urbanisation (1899)



# Woodhouse Moor: The Original Leeds Public Park



## The Council takes control

For many years, individuals had claimed **common rights** to graze cattle and other animals on the Moor.

Bringing the Moor into public ownership protected it from encroachment, yet it also challenged the exercise of common rights, which were extinguished under the Leeds Improvement Act 1866.

## Regulating behaviour

Soon after acquisition, the Council sought to regulate public conduct on the Moor. They built a **police station** for the Moor in 1857, and started to clamp down on people playing dangerous games. 'Knor and spell' (a traditional Yorkshire bat-and-ball game) was restricted to the northern part of the Moor in 1859, and prohibited altogether from 1867.



The police station on the edge of the Moor (c.1890s)

## Preserving an Historic Green Space

Woodhouse Moor was an historic area of open land. Leeds residents felt they had a right of **public access** to the Moor, which had existed since 'time immemorial'. For centuries, they had used the Moor as a site of recreation, political demonstration and military assembly.

By the 1850s, the people of Leeds had become concerned that the Moor was under threat from **encroachments** upon the land, including rubbish dumps, cow houses, pig sties and even cottages.

In 1854, a public campaign was launched to acquire the Moor and to protect it from further development. Eventually, in 1857, the Town Council purchased the Moor for £3,000, making it the city's first public park.

### Public Access

'From time immemorial the inhabitants of Leeds have availed themselves of a privilege which they deemed incontestable – they have sauntered and lounged upon Woodhouse Moor'  
(Leeds Times 1854)

### Encroachments

'Every attempt to encroach upon the Moor has been opposed, and the rights of the burgesses [townspeople] to the unrestricted use of the Moor have been guarded with jealous care'  
(Leeds Mercury 1855)

## Improving the Moor

In the early years, the Moor was in poor condition – it was not properly drained or lit, and there was no coherent plan for its design.

From the 1880s, there was a concerted effort to improve the Moor, laying walkways, planting gardens, erecting a **bandstand** and establishing a gymnasium on Monument Moor. By 1900, the look of the Moor had been transformed.

However, there was also opposition to such 'improvements' from residents who argued that it should remain a clear open space:

*'We don't want any Roundhay Park on Woodhouse Moor: we want a clear and open space where our children can... jump and play to their hearts' content.'* ('A Working Man' 1877)



A postcard view of the bandstand (c.1905)





# Roundhay Park: 'The Jewel in the Crown'



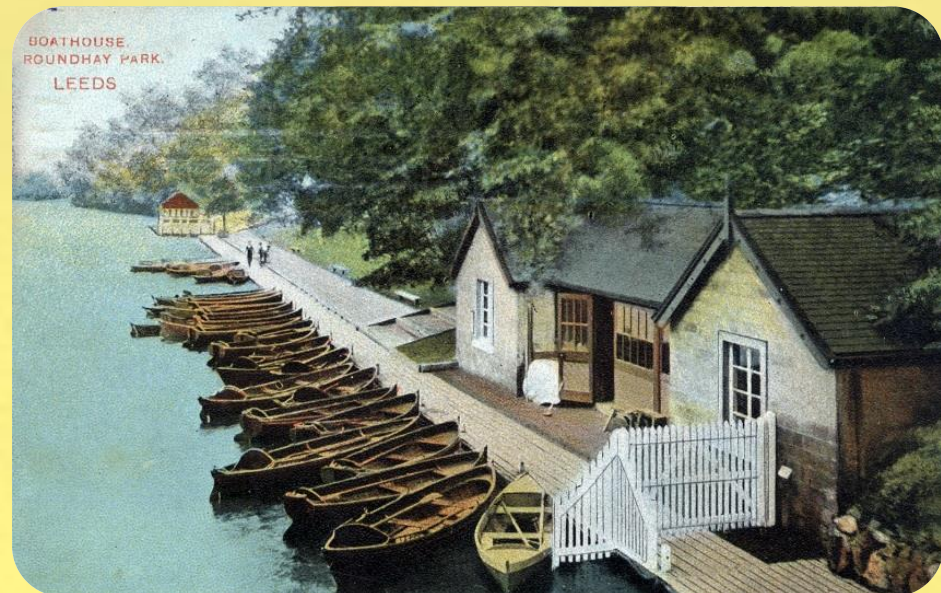
## Foolhardy speculators?

Shortly after acquisition, a petition by several major industrialists criticised the purchase. They objected that the Council had engaged in such a speculative deal, that would likely lead to increases in local taxes.

However, public opinion was generally favourable towards acquisition. A petition in support attracted 26,000 signatures, and the Council's opponents were mocked in the press for snobbery and self-interest:

*'What a pity it is that we, the working classes, are such a nuisance, because we should go to the park in such large numbers, and perhaps disturb these would-be-kind-hearted gentlemen.'* ('One of the Multitude' 1872)

Over time, the Council sought to recover some of its expenses by capitalising on the Park's assets, including by allowing contractors to run **boating** on the lake.



A postcard view of the boathouse (c.1906)

## A Great Civic Venture

Roundhay Park had been part of a landed estate for many centuries. The Nicholson family owned the estate from 1803. By the time the estate came up for sale in 1871, the drive to create parks and green spaces had lost momentum, and the city's two public parks (especially Woodhouse Moor) were seen to be in poor condition.

Leading figures in the city seized this opportunity to reinvigorate the parks movement. A small group ('the four gentlemen') led by John Barran, Mayor of Leeds, purchased the land for £139,000. For Barran, acquisition of the estate reflected and reinforced a **sense of progress** at that time.

The official opening in 1872, before a crowd of over 100,000 people, was regarded as an **historic moment** for the city.

### Sense of Progress

'[Mayor Barran] did not think that Leeds would ever take a step of a progressive character which would prove more beneficial than the acquisition of this park'  
(Leeds Intelligencer 1871)

### Historic Moment

'The day when Roundhay Park was opened...will form an epoch from which many an event...in the history of the town, will henceforth be reckoned.'  
(Leeds Times 1872)

## Increasing accessibility

Some residents criticised the acquisition of Roundhay Park on the grounds that it was situated far from the city centre, meaning that most people would not be able to access it. Councillors from south Leeds argued that four smaller, local parks would have been a better use of public funds.

Improvements to local transport – particularly the electrification of the tramways in 1891 – made it easier for a broad section of society to travel to the Park:

*'The facilities for getting to the Park were never better than they are now, and the competition between tram cars, 'buses and waggonettes has reduced fares to a point which ought to satisfy the shrewdest Yorkshireman determined to have full value for his money.'* (Leeds Intelligencer 1891)

By the turn of the century, many visitors journeyed to the Park in these ways. As a result, **large crowds** were commonly pictured at this time.



A crowd at the bandstand (c.1910)



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# Cross Flatts Park: A Local Community Park



## What's in a name?

Following initial improvement works, the Park opened to the public in 1891. 5,000 people attended the opening ceremony, which was led by Sir Edwin Gaunt, Mayor of Leeds.

Most people had assumed it would be called 'Holbeck Park'. Posters advertising the opening ceremony referred to it by that name.

Given the Park was meant for residents across the south of Leeds, the Council ultimately decided to christen it 'Cross Flatts Park'.

The change of name remained something of a sore point for Holbeck's councillors. It also caused trouble for Mayor Gaunt who, a few years after acquisition, mispronounced it as 'Flott's Crass Park', much to the amusement of rival councillors!



A postcard view of the bandstand (c.1913)

## A Park for the South of Leeds

By the late-nineteenth century, there was still no park specifically for the south of Leeds. When Woodhouse Moor was acquired, there were calls to purchase Holbeck and Hunslet Moors too, but these came to nothing. While the Moors provided a space for children to play, there was still an unmet **demand** for a local public park for working people.

After a public meeting calling for a local park in 1887, the Council committed to provide a park for **south Leeds**. They initially considered three possible sites – Beggars' Hill, Brown Lane and Cross Flatts – but settled upon the latter, purchasing the land from the Low Moor Company in 1889 for £12,000.

### Demand

'The labourers want these "parks" as near at hand as possible, so that they can enjoy an hour's pleasure after they have finished their day's toil'

(*'One of the Working Class'* 1888)

### South Leeds

'The Corporation are taking a comprehensive view of the necessities of the vast population south of the river, to all of whom this site is readily accessible'

(*Leeds Mercury* 1888)

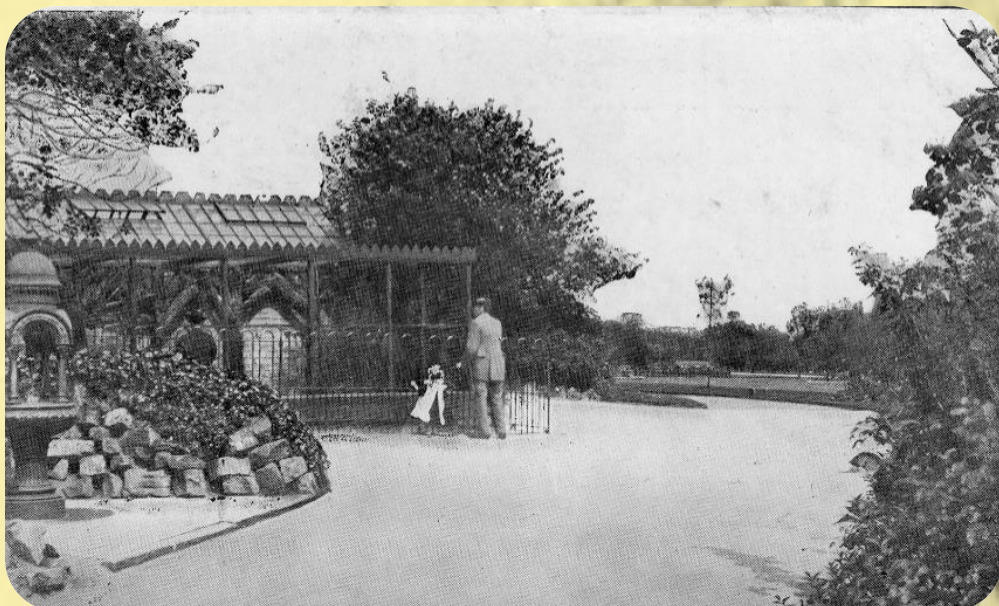
## Investing in the Park

Shortly after the purchase, some residents were concerned that the Council was 'dilly-dallying' in not getting on with improvements to Cross Flatts. However, within a few years, work was gathering pace. In 1893, a columnist for the Leeds Times commented:

*'The park is now looking at its best...This pleasure resort is improving every day, and is the joy of the whole neighbourhood.'* (*Leeds Times* 1893)

A significant sum of money was invested in the Park in its early years, paying for broad walkways, flower gardens, a bandstand, and a **conservatory**. Some teased that even Roundhay Park, for all its grandeur, had nothing to compare with the Cross Flatts conservatory!

By the turn of the century, Cross Flatts was viewed as a model, well-managed local park.



A father and daughter visit the conservatory (c.1910)

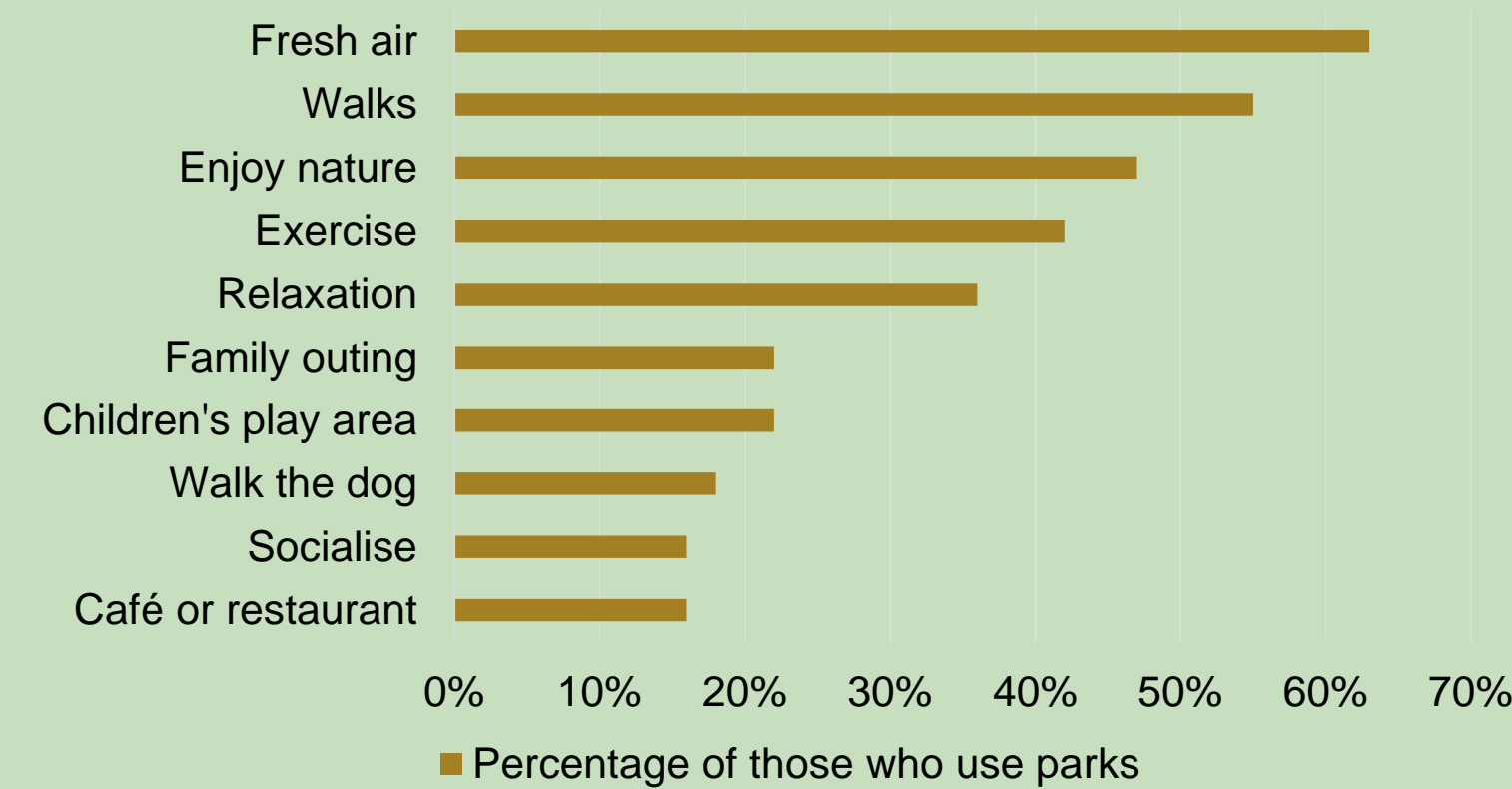


# People's Use of Parks



## Reasons to visit

Our survey findings show the main reasons park users visit parks. Over half use parks for **fresh air** (63%) and **walks** (55%). The top ten reasons are:



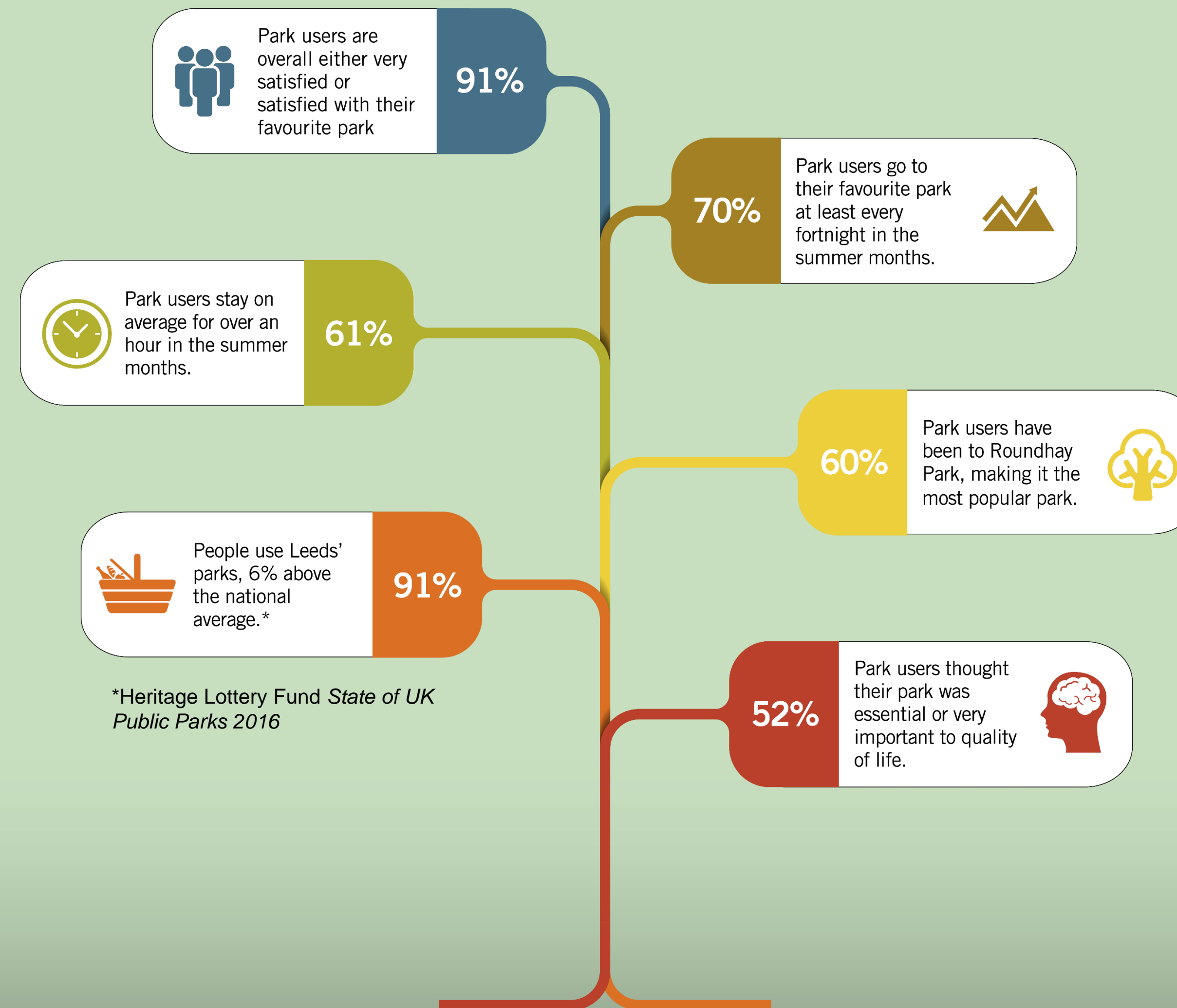
These are examples of some park users' experiences:

*'Open space, green balm of my soul... I fill my lungs in this peaceful place. The city's most vital area.'*

*'I never get tired walking around the area, It's a lovely place to get away from it all.'*

*'Taking grandchildren and watching them and others children running around outside in the fresh air.'*

## Park Use in Leeds is Widespread



\*Heritage Lottery Fund State of UK Public Parks 2016

Based on 6,432 responses to our public survey, June to November 2016. Responses are weighted to account for gender and ethnicity.

## Old and new leisure uses

Park managers are keen that parks evolve to serve the diverse needs and preferences of communities, but recognise there may not always be a consensus on appropriate uses.

*'I think the Moor has to move on, it has to keep developing... to meet the social needs of the people who use it.'* (Park manager)

Park users suggested a range of possible new uses, including open air theatre, yoga, outdoor clubs, Pokémon Go and even bat watching! Many want schools to use parks as outdoor classrooms.

Other visitors are keen to revive old uses, such as open-air swimming pools, rowing on Roundhay's Waterloo Lake and the historic Children's Day.

*'I hope to return to using the lake how it used to be in my childhood, with boat trips.'* (Park user)

Certain activities, such as bowling, are declining in popularity. This is leaving designated spaces little-used, suggesting a need for re-purposing.

Some visitors are keen for parks to be kept as green spaces where their use is not constrained by design features or designated activities.

*'I love parks as they are. No need for social engineering. People find their own uses.'* (Park user)



# Park Visitor Preferences



## Push and pull factors

Park visitors selected reasons why they do not use their local park most often. Over a third (35%) **prefer other parks and open spaces**. Others identify the disadvantages of their local park.



Park users explain why their local park is not their preferred place to visit:

*‘No public toilets or cafe, not enough seats.’*

*‘Seems to be only for dog walkers.’*

*‘There is no parkrun there.’*

*‘Smashed glass everywhere.’*

*‘Golden Acre is bigger and caters for my needs.’*

*‘I used to go to Lotherton Hall a lot. This stopped when the park started to charge.’*

## Leeds’ Parks are Social Assets

Our survey findings show that 37% of park users do not usually visit their local park, preferring to travel further afield to access their park of choice. This suggests many people view parks as **social** rather than **local** assets.

*‘I prefer Roundhay Park, even though it is one of the furthest [away], because it is big, beautiful, peaceful, and interesting.’* (Park user)

This finding reflects tensions between parks as city-wide resources and as green spaces for local residents. People are attracted to major parks with diverse facilities that meet their needs.

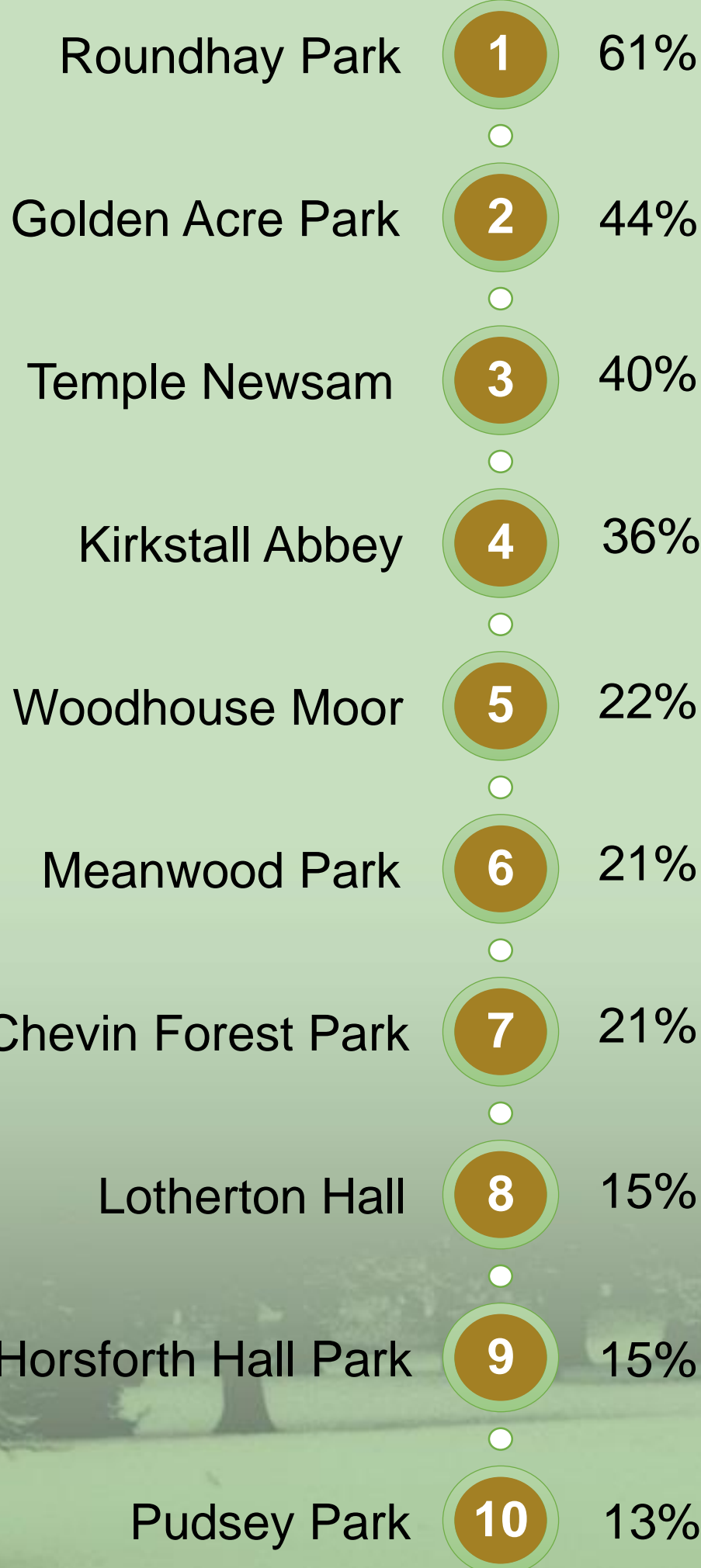
*‘Roundhay Park is our most visited site... it’s not really a city park anymore it’s a regional park. It’s pulling people from across the north of England.’* (Park manager)

People choose which park to visit based on a variety of factors:



## Most popular parks to visit

Roundhay Park is the most popular park to visit, attracting 61% of park users in the past year. Some well-resourced parks, like Roundhay, that are in good condition and have a range of facilities act as ‘magnets’ attracting visitors from across the city and further afield.



Based on 6,432 responses to our public survey, June to November 2016. Responses are weighted to account for gender and ethnicity.



# The Value of Public Parks



## Health and wellbeing

Parks in Leeds provide a valuable space for physical exercise. Our survey findings show 42% of park users visit their park to exercise. Organised events such as *parkrun UK* bring new visitors to parks. Woodhouse Moor was the first *parkrun* outside of London and attracts an average of 267 runners per week. Newer facilities such as the outdoor gym equipment at Cross Flatts Park are popular among park users from a range of communities.



Jogging and volleyball on Woodhouse Moor (2016)

According to the charity Mind, one in four people in the UK will experience a mental health problem every year. Parks are a space for self-reflection and calm, and play a valuable role in personal wellbeing, helping people to cope with depression.

Overall, 52% of park users think spending time in their park is essential or very important to their quality of life. However, many who do not use parks cite poor health and disability.

## Place-Making and Building Communities



*'The whole area's identity is based on this park. Love it or loathe it, people call it Hyde Park... It's so engrained with the local community that they confuse the name... To take [the park] away would be losing the identity of the area. It's just intrinsic to life here.'* (Park user, Woodhouse Moor)

## Maximising the value of parks

Park managers and users are keen to maximise the benefits of parks by identifying ways to make better use of them. Popular ideas include art and education, to teach children about nature and climate change.

Parks could become vital to social prescribing, whereby individuals are recommended outdoor activities to help combat mental health or social issues, such as loneliness.

Regular physical activity could also reduce the strain on the NHS. Every £1 spent on walking schemes could save the NHS over £7 according to recent research.

According to park managers, parks have a diversity of benefits:

*'They're there, they're functioning for communities, they're providing children's memories, healthy activities, space to go and de-stress, sport, recreation, conservation, flood management, all of the things that we do that I think are overlooked in some ways.'*





# Park Regulation and Management



## Regulatory challenges

Parks can be contested spaces. Competing interests and conflicting demands by different sections of the community can create tensions, presenting challenges for authorities managing shared public spaces.

Interviews with users of our three case study parks give a flavour of some of these challenges.

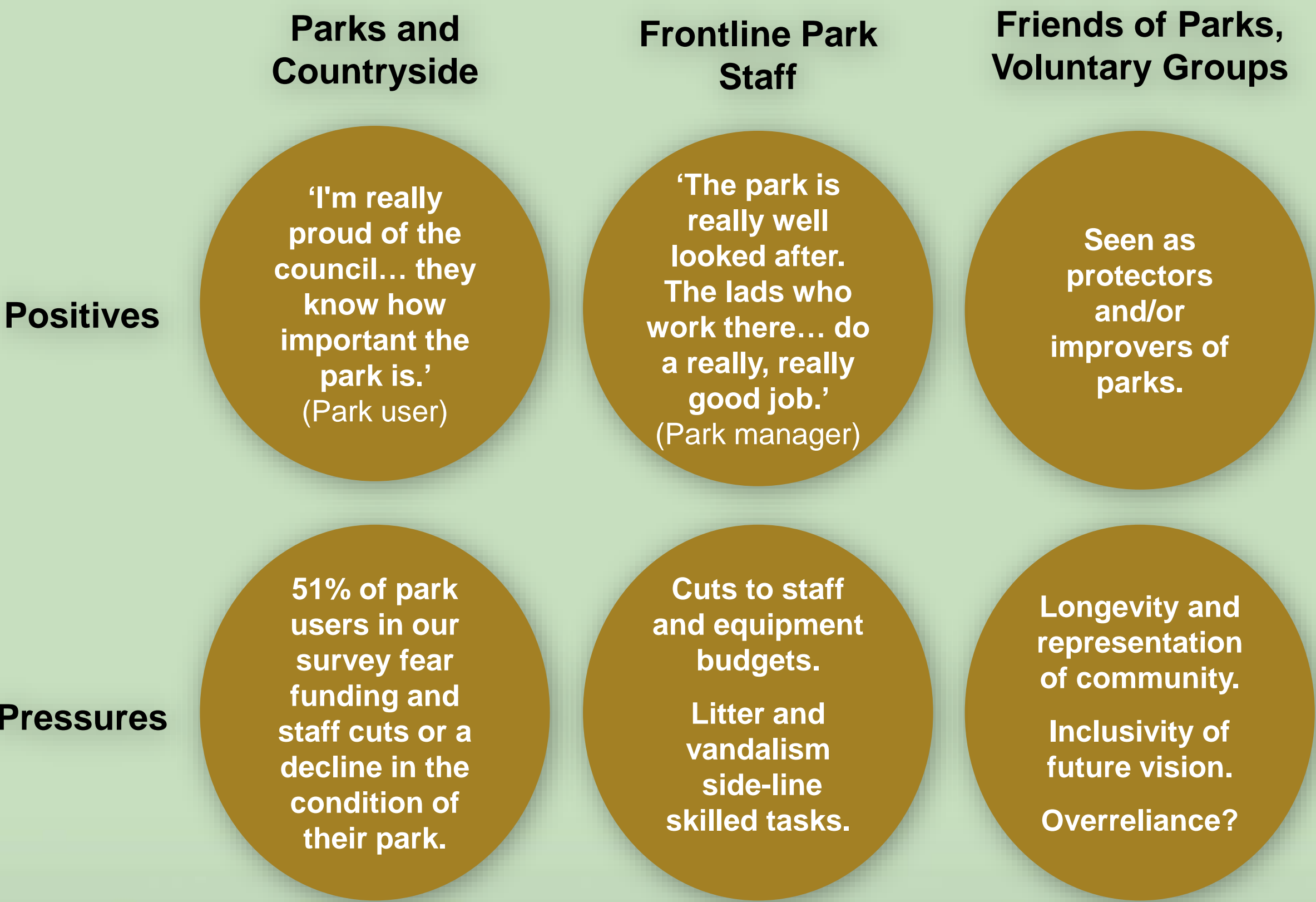
The volume of student use on Woodhouse Moor has generated debates about appropriate use and behaviour, particularly regarding barbeques, litter and late-night parties. Some features of the park’s design are contentious, such as the location of the skate park next to the children’s playground.

For Roundhay Park, protecting the cricket pitch and track cycling arena (from what?) was a significant concern, as was litter and behaviour in the car parks.

In Cross Flatts Park, the erection of a boundary fence, marked a turning point in tackling crime and anti-social behaviour, but it is an on-going challenge to manage.

Park managers are keen for parks to serve the diverse needs and preferences of different user groups, and saw part of their role as holding the line between the different demands and interests.

## Who looks after our parks?



## Park rules and use

Most park users we interviewed were unaware that are formal bye-laws regulating behaviour in parks. For some, bye-laws place restrictions on their preferred ways of using parks.

Some visitors want to amend specific park rules to permit currently restricted uses, including open water swimming, cycling and barbequing.

The idea of lighting parks in winter and evenings to extend use, for example for evening walks, is popular with some visitors. Others believe night lighting will enhance their safety.

Concerns were raised that lighting may make people feel safer but put them at risk of crime.

*‘So what lights do is make people feel safer, a bit like walking through with your mobile phone... it would just mean that students are more likely to get attacked’* (Police officer)

As such, park managers and police officers were often of the view that parks should not be lit after dark, restricting use to daylight hours.

*‘We tend to quote the old Victorian rules and regulations... The park is open dawn till dusk.’*  
(Park manager)



Sign publicising regulations for Woodhouse Moor (2016)



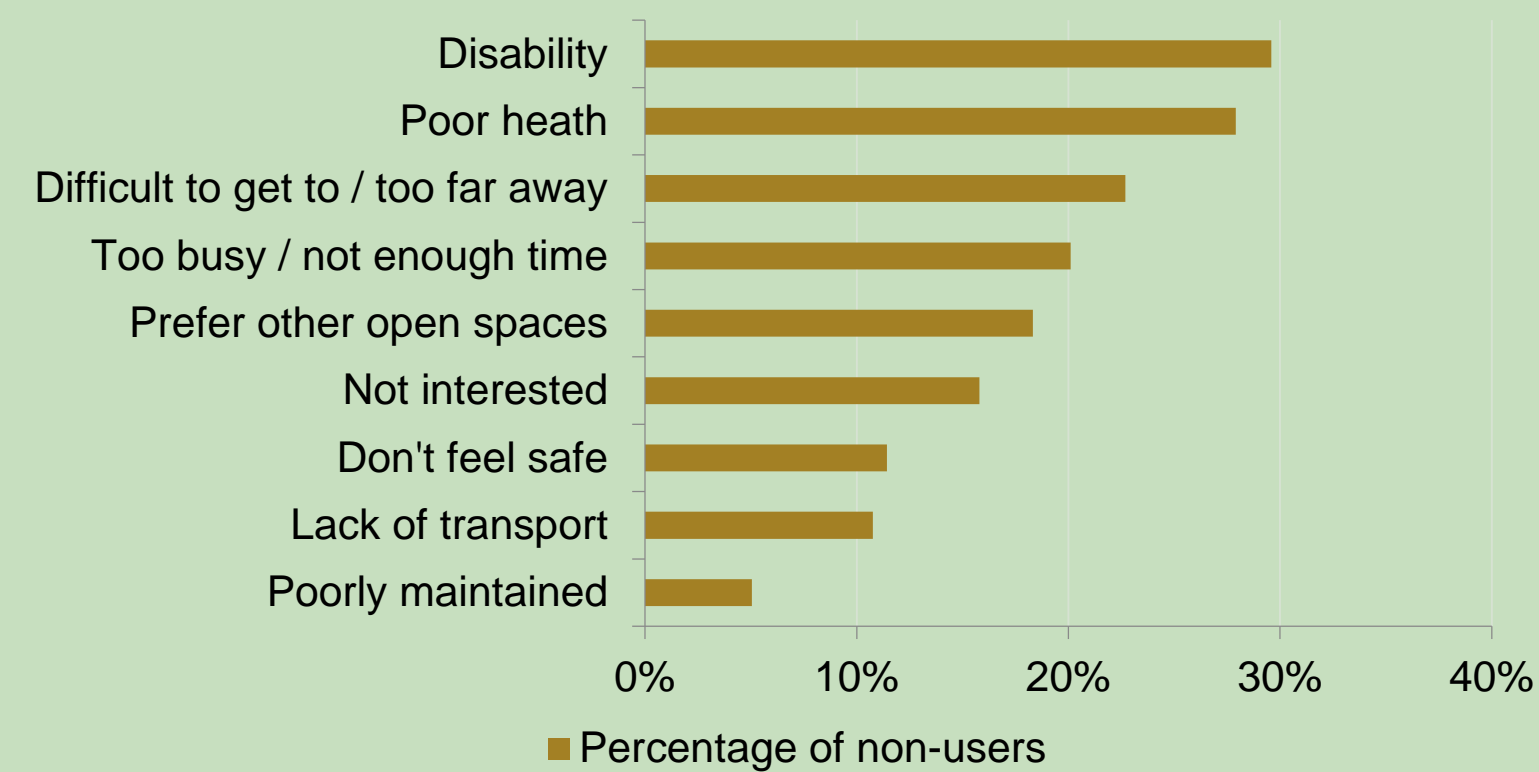
# Non-Use and Avoidance of Parks



## Non-use

While most people in Leeds visit parks, 9% have not used them in the past year. Our survey findings show that people aged over 75 and those with a disability are significantly less likely to use parks.

Non-users selected the reasons they do not use parks. The top reasons are **disability** (30%) and **poor health** (28%), which are often a concern for the elderly.

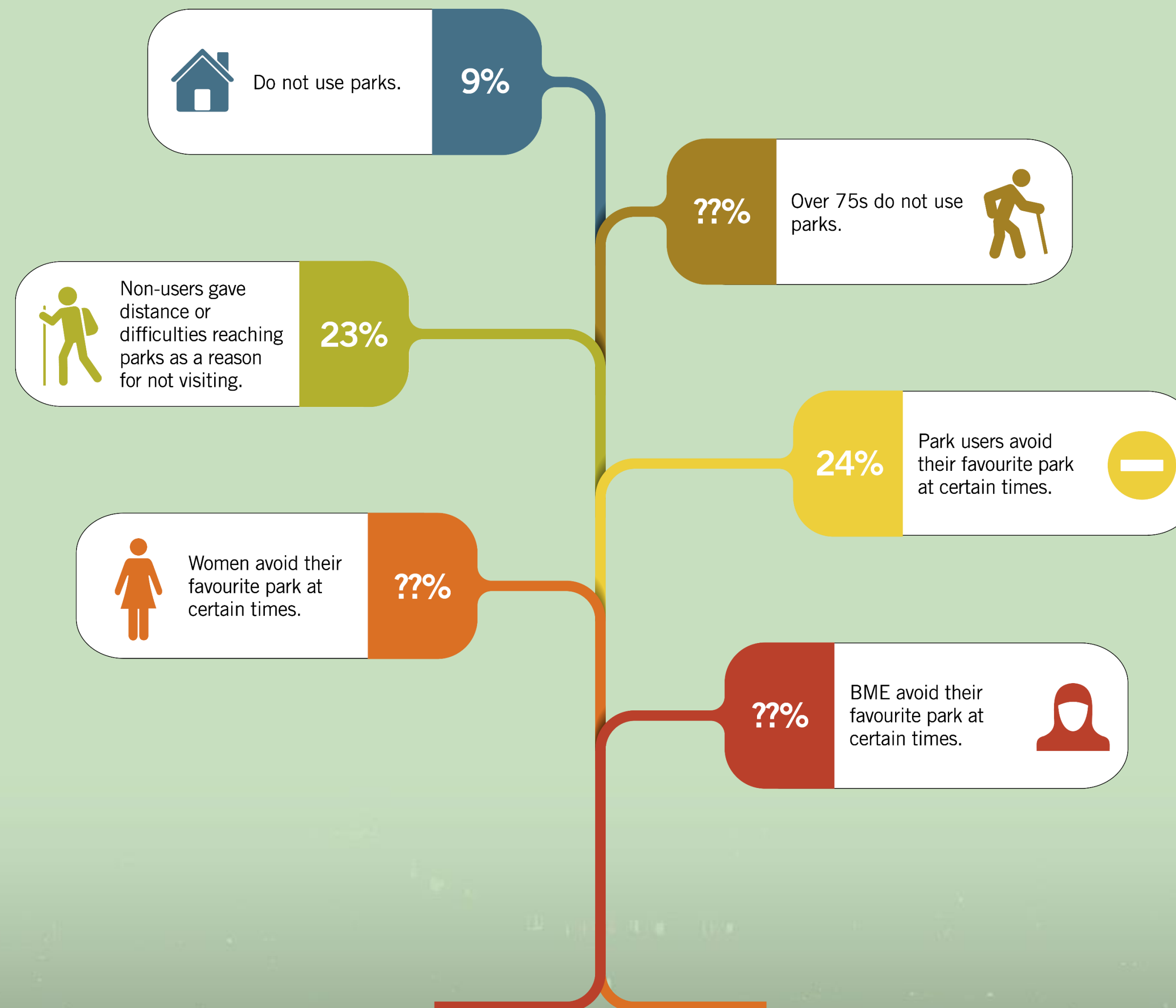


*'I am 86 years old, my legs are very bad at walking and I don't have transport. I used to love to go to Temple Newsam.'* (Non-user)

*'I am a disabled, wheelchair user without my own transport so access is difficult.'* (Non-user)

Given there is an ageing population, this problem is likely to grow in the future unless parks and neighbourhood services adapt.

## Why do People Not Use Parks?



Based on 6,432 responses to our public survey, June to November 2016. Responses are weighted to account for gender and ethnicity.

## Avoidance

Park users identify diverse reasons for avoiding parks at certain times. These often relate to competing uses of parks by different visitor groups.

A common reason for avoidance was concerns about safety, which is connected to use after dark and the behaviour of other park users.

While most park users describe their experiences as pleasant and report feeling safe in the daytime, nearly a quarter (24%) avoid visiting them at certain times.

*'On an evening it has people openly drinking alcohol and I regularly see people drug dealing.'*

*'During football season due to the swearing of the footballers and fans.'*

Others avoid parks due to factors associated with specific events or periods of heavy use. These include issues with parking, noise and litter.

*'Sunny weekends - unpleasantly busy. In effect, it is a victim of its own success.'*

*'When there is a fair, because of noise.'*

*'When there are events as parking is at a premium.'*

Some users avoid parks because of concerns about dogs.

*'Generally between 8am-10am and 4pm-6pm on weekdays... because there are too many dogs off leads and not under control by their owners.'*





# The Future of Public Parks: National Context



## The changing fortunes of parks

By the late twentieth century, the decline of the Victorian park model was apparent, notably in the demise of the park keeper and loss of historic features.

At the turn of the millennium, the condition of parks had reached an all-time-low and visitor numbers were falling. The future prospects and rationale for parks was bleak and uncertain.

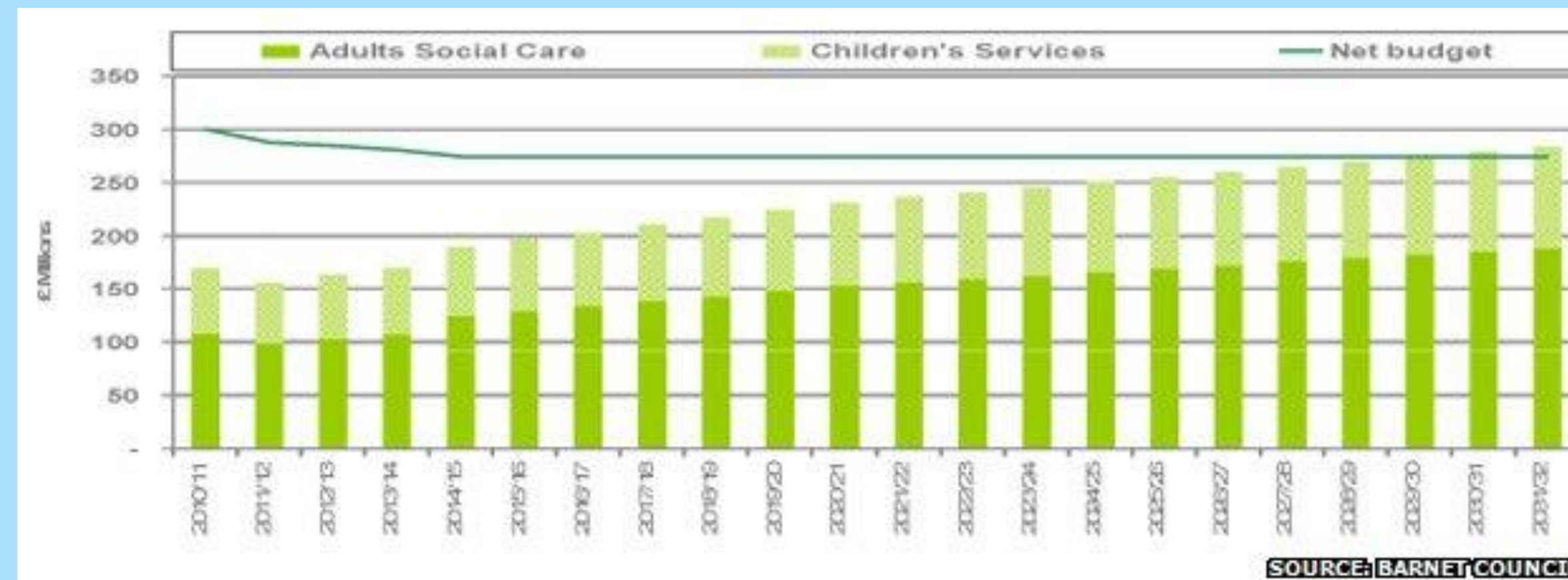
A renaissance in urban parks during the 2000s led some to envisage parks would be recognised as an essential part of the city's 'metabolism'; as vital as its 'roads, rail lines or water pipes' (Worpole 2012).

Today, parks are at a critical juncture. The *State of UK Public Parks 2016* report found that over 90% of local authority park budgets had been cut. This trend is expected to continue.

Councils do not have a legal duty to provide or maintain parks. Many are considering drastic action, including selling parks or outsourcing their management to private companies, voluntary groups and charitable trusts.

As in the early Victorian period, there has been a rallying call to preserve urban parks and green spaces for future generations to come.

## The 'Graph of Doom'



Some predictions suggest that within 20 years, if spending projections are accurate and unless things change dramatically, increasing numbers of local authorities will be unable to provide any services except adult social care and children's services.

***'statutory services and social care costs will swallow up most local council spending leaving very little for other services to the community such as libraries, parks and leisure centres.'***

(John Hannen 2012)

## Inquiry into the future of parks

A Government Select Committee inquiry was set up in July 2016 to examine the impact of reduced budgets and identify ways to prevent parks from tipping into a spiral of decline.

The Committee preferred not to recommend a statutory duty on local authorities to protect parks. Instead, it proposed that councils work with health and wellbeing boards and others to develop joint green space strategies.

Maximising the diverse benefits of parks to health and wellbeing, the local economy, flood risk management, social cohesion, education and leisure are key policy recommendations.

The Minister for Parks is implementing plans to provide national leadership and coordination of the sector to address the challenges facing parks today. These include:

- Managing competing uses and functions of parks;
- Competing with other services for investment;
- Addressing inequalities in access to parks, especially for residents in deprived areas;
- Raising the priority of parks in planning policy, given pressures to increase housing supply.

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# Expectations for the Future of Parks: Hopes



## The always and ever park

Park users identified hopes and fears for the future of the park they visit most often. Our survey findings show the top hope is that **parks remain in a good condition or become cleaner** (36%).

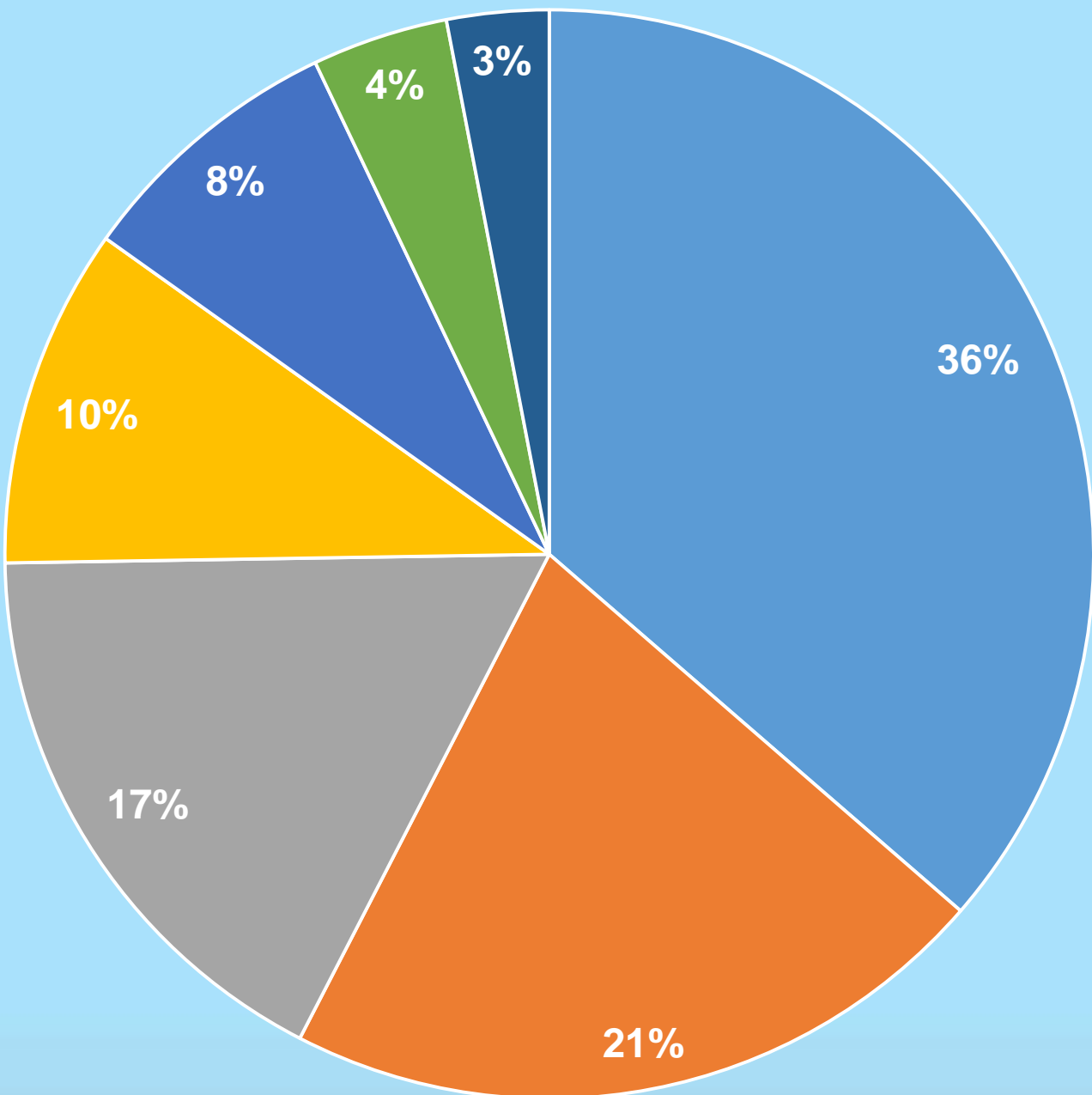
Over a fifth (21%) hope **parks continue to exist as a free public space**. Users also hope for **more or improved facilities (e.g. paths) and staffing** (17%).

Interviews with park users in our case study sites delved deeper into people’s expectations for the future. Many perceived parks to be a quintessential component of the city, important in both historic and contemporary times. This, alongside their longevity as public spaces, often led visitors to the expectation that parks will exist for future generations, though their condition or uses may fluctuate over time.

*‘It’s been here for over 100 years already... it’s certainly never going to be sold for housing is it?’*  
(Park user, Cross Flatts Park)

Other users think that parks will continue to exist, but only because they are defended by local community groups. Conversely, some users believe parks will continue and thrive, but only because they will be ‘updated’ to meet changing needs and modern uses.

## People Hope Parks will Improve and Remain Free to Access



### Park Users’ Hopes for the Future

- Parks remain in good quality standard or become cleaner
- Parks continue to exist as a free public space
- More or improved facilities (e.g. paths) and staffing
- More or improved leisure facilities and events
- Parks become a greater utilised by communities
- Parks become safer
- Other

Based on 6,432 responses to our public survey, June to November 2016.  
Coded responses to the following question: What is your main hope for the future of your park?

## Danger of complacency?

There is awareness among park users that parks are under threat, yet concerns about their sustainability are not tangible for most.

Other than a broad appreciation of austerity pressures, most park users we interviewed are not familiar with the extent of the crisis in parks funding and management.

Almost all park users we interviewed considered their fears about the loss and decline of parks unlikely to be realised. Indeed, our survey findings show that the majority of park users are reasonably optimistic about the condition of parks either improving or remaining the same over the next three years (ADD STATISTIC %).

By contrast, park managers are acutely aware of the scale of the funding challenges facing public parks:

*‘Part of me wants to say really, wake up people! Wake up to the threat that your local park is under. Because... if you don’t have a bit of commercialisation and make the assets work, the free access isn’t going to be there.’*

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# Expectations for the Future of Parks: Fears



## A spiralling effect?

Park users' top fear is that parks will **decline in condition** (30%). Over a fifth (21%) fear **funding and staff cuts**.

Other notable fears were the **loss of parks or part of them** (17%) and that **parks become or remain unsafe due to crime or antisocial behaviour** (17%).

In light of fiscal restraints, park users fear that Leeds City Council may be forced to take a hands-off approach to parks, or even withdraw from maintaining some green spaces completely.

The feared decline in the condition of parks is thought will have a spiralling effect. Some users suggest that if parks are not maintained they will become less safe, less pleasant or loose facilities that cater for their needs. In turn, visitors expect their experiences of using parks to deteriorate.

*'If not maintained it will become a no go area due to crime.'*

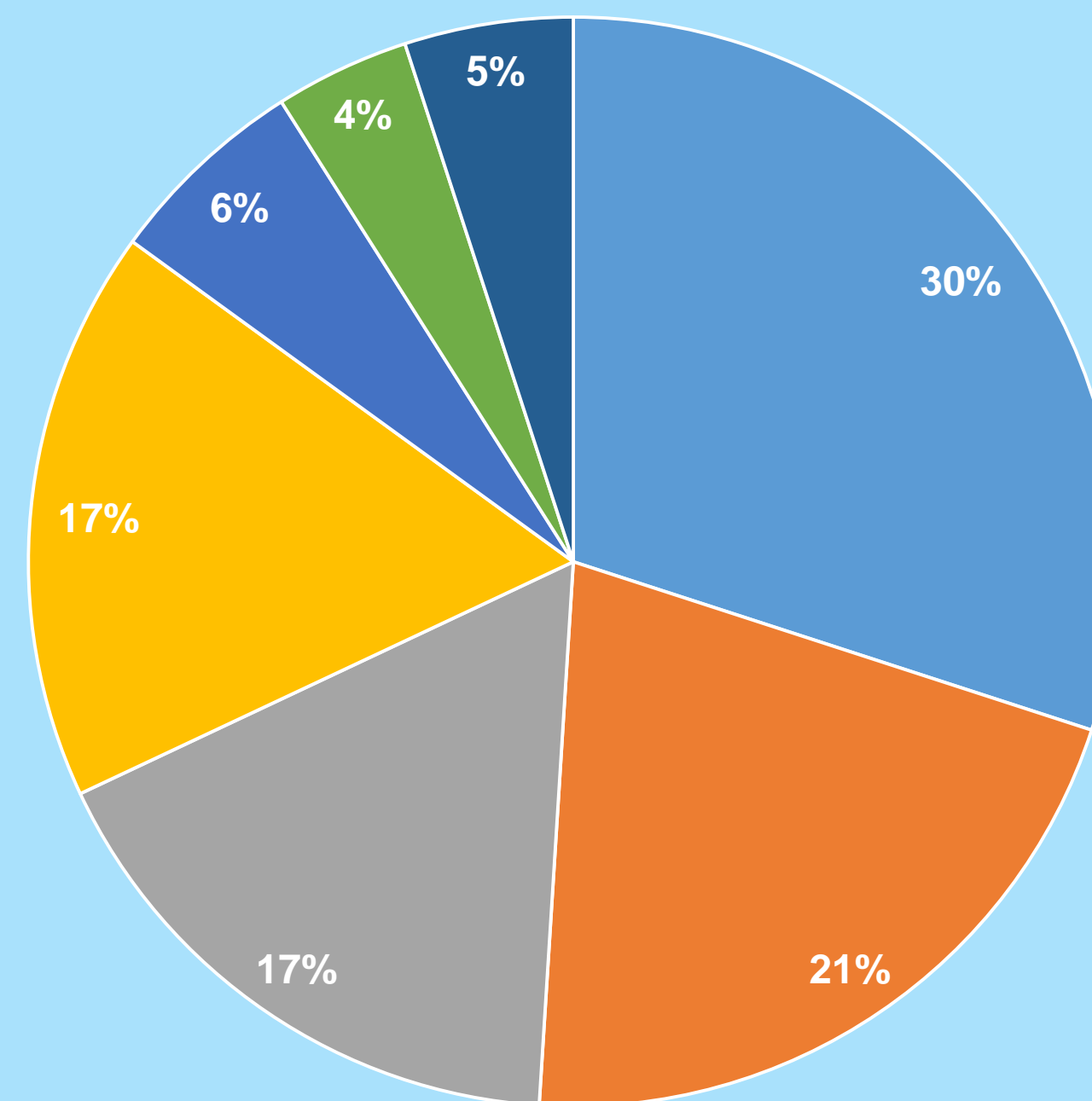
*'It's not looked after and becomes an unwelcome place to be.'*

Some users also anticipate that if the condition of parks decline, this may be used to justify their closure, selling off, transfer to private management or redevelopment.

*'Left to be overgrown and run down, passed on to private ownership and run for profit.'*

*'Parts of it will disappear to be sold off as housing.'*

## People Fear Parks will Decline



### Park Users' Fears for the Future

- Parks will decline in condition
- Funding or staff cuts
- Loss of parks or parts of them (closed, sold off, leased for commercial use, redeveloped or privatised)
- Park becomes or continues to be unsafe due to crime and anti-social behaviour
- Introduction of charges or fees
- Integrity of parks are compromised by development, an excess of new facilities or entertainments
- Other

Based on 6,432 responses to our public survey, June to November 2016

Coded responses to the following question: What is your main fear for the future of your park?

## Drawing inspiration from the past

The Victorian park movement arose out of threats to green space and a determination to act for the benefit of future generations of city-dwellers. Various public-spirited efforts were made to acquire and improve parks for the people, including public subscriptions, philanthropic activity and local authority investment.

The difficulties facing public parks today have put into question what innovative solutions our society can find to support and preserve parks for future generations.

Park managers across the UK are responding in diverse ways to meet current challenges. These include generating commercial income, cutting costs, reducing facilities, outsourcing maintenance, and disposing of parks or parts of them.

Leeds City Council have pursued some commercial opportunities to support general upkeep.

*'If we can save on money of maintaining the park but still keep the facility, I'd rather do that than where, I don't know, if you listen to Bristol Council, and they're selling bits of their parks off to fund [the upkeep of remaining parkland]... that just doesn't make sense for me.'* (Park manager)

But, as in the early Victorian period, there is also a role for the broader public to play in supporting and preserving parks for future generations.

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# Park Futures: Images of the Parks of Tomorrow



## Seven Possible Park Futures

Our research develops seven models of what parks might become in the future, as park managers seek to navigate the challenges of **cost**, **congestion** and **competing uses** of parks.

No one park is likely to conform exactly to any specific model and they may exist together within any given park at one time.

All are possible futures, although on current trends some appear to be more probable than others. Preferable futures for parks, in contrast, are those that reflect ethical and moral choices.

The future of parks is likely to be a plural mix of these seven models.



### City Magnet Park

A city-wide public asset, integrated within an urban strategy to host major events or a resource to manage social issues, trumping local interests.



### Club Park

A club good or 'managed commons' whereby parks serve local interests and needs, drawing on funding through a local levy/tax or volunteer upkeep.



### Theme Park

A residual public good hosting commercial activities and amenities (entertainment, leisure or services) paid for to subsidise park-wide upkeep.



### For Sale Park

A private good, sold (whole or in parts) for commercial development or as a green space asset, accessible by invitation or membership - governed by property rights.



### Laissez-Faire Park

A public good with minimal design or management – a form of 'cultural playdough' – whereby conflicts over use are left to users to self-regulate.



### Co-Mingling Park

A public good in which social interaction among diverse users is encouraged on the basis of 'codes of conduct' to regulate behaviour and use.



### Variegated Park

A differentiated public good, organised to accommodate a range of users at different times/places whereby conflict is managed through 'zoning'.

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# The History of Leeds Parks



## A space to play?

Parks provided people with a space to play, but some games annoyed visitors looking for peace and quiet.

By the 1800s, many games were considered dangerous and disorderly, and so they were gradually banned from the parks.

‘Knor and spell’, an old bat-and-ball game, was banned from Leeds parks in 1867.



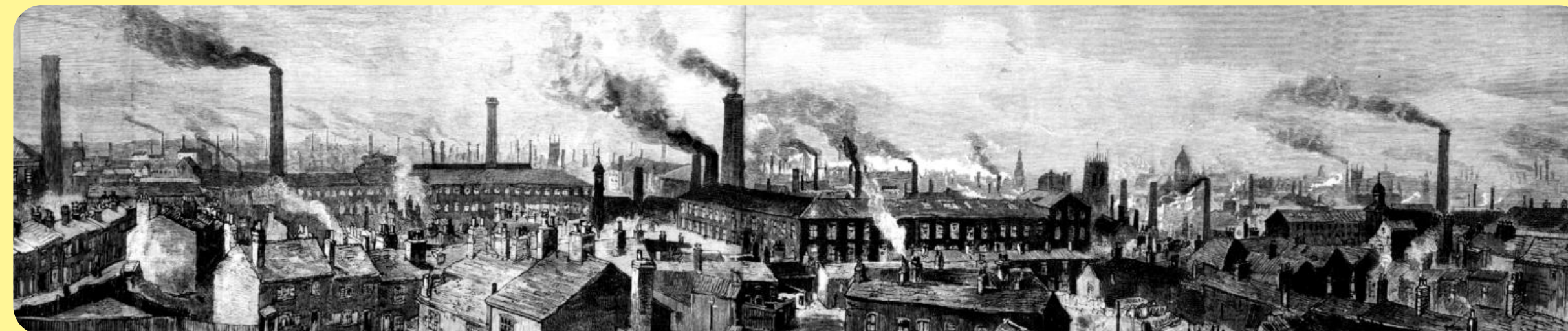
Children enjoying themselves on Woodhouse Moor (early 1900s)

## Why were Parks First Created?

During the 1800s, Leeds grew from a small town into a big city. Many houses were crowded with too many people, and the air was filled with **smoke** from giant factories.

Parks were created to provide people with a green space where they could escape from the city. They were part of the Town Council’s plan to make Leeds a cleaner, healthier and more orderly place to live.

Parks were created in the 1800s to try to make Leeds a healthier place to live.



Smoke and pollution from factories and houses in Leeds (1885)

The first Leeds park was purchased in 1857. By 1910, Leeds had over 20 public parks.

## What did people do in parks?

In the 1800s, people were encouraged to take walks in parks and to enjoy the fresh air, after long days working in factories or offices.

In the 1900s, new leisure and exercise facilities arrived in parks, such as gym equipment, tennis courts and **swimming pools**.

What do you like doing at the park?  
Is there anything people used to do at the park that you would enjoy?



A busy day at the bathing pool at Roundhay Park (1944)



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## Why are some parks so popular?

Lots of different things attract people to particular parks. People often like parks that have somewhere to eat, lots of space, and which are easy to get to.

Some people choose their park to take part in organised activities, such as free **parkruns**.

Which park is your favourite?  
What do you like about it?



People participating in a parkrun at Bramley Park

## Which are People’s Favourite Parks?

Over 6,000 people who completed our survey told us which parks they visited in Leeds. These are the ten most popular parks:

### Leeds Parks: The Top Ten

Roundhay Park	1	61%
Golden Acre Park	2	44%
Temple Newsam	3	40%
Kirkstall Abbey	4	36%
Woodhouse Moor	5	22%
Meanwood Park	6	21%
Chevin Forest Park	7	21%
Lotherton Hall	8	15%
Horsforth Hall Park	9	15%
Pudsey Park	10	13%

## Are parks just for local people?

Although most people tend to visit their local park, many choose to visit a different park which is further away.

Some of the biggest parks in Leeds, such as **Roundhay**, Golden Acre and Temple Newsam, also attract lots of visitors from outside the city.

Roundhay Park is the most popular park in Leeds.



People like Roundhay because it is a large, attractive park



Images reproduced courtesy of Simon Cullingworth and Jock Graham



# The Future of Leeds Parks



## What will the parks of tomorrow be like?

Because of funding cuts, parks may look different in the near future. They might have more attractions which you pay for, or they might be open only to people who pay to be members. Some parks may be divided up into zones designed for different visitors.



What would you like to see in parks in the future?

## Why do Parks Need our Help?

Most parks in Leeds are in good condition and are well used by people. But Leeds City Council, which manages our parks, is having its funding cut. This means there will probably be less money to spend on keeping parks in good condition in the future, unless other funding can be found.

**Because of funding cuts, it will be a challenge to protect public parks for future generations.**

Most people hope that parks in Leeds will remain as they are, or continue to improve. However, many fear that parks may fall into poor condition as a result of funding cuts.

**People in Leeds hope their parks will survive and improve, but they fear that parks may decline.**

## What can we learn from the past?

In the 1800s, town councils, businessmen and members of the public gave money to help pay for parks for the people to enjoy.

Today, all of us can play a part in protecting and improving parks for the benefit of future generations.

**What can you do to help care for your favourite park?**



Opening ceremony at Kirk Lane Park in Yeadon (1907), which was donated to the people by a local factory owner



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