

**Report of:** Leisure and Parks Business Manager

**To:** Cowley Area Committee

**Date:** 5<sup>th</sup> April 2006

**Item No:**

**Title of Report :** Cowley Marsh Recreation Developments



### Summary and Recommendations



**Purpose of report:** To inform councillors of the results of consultation carried out regarding improvements to Cowley Marsh Recreation Ground and the surrounding area. To gain initial support for projects in the area.

**Key decision:** N/A

**Portfolio Holder:** Mary Clarkson

**Scrutiny Responsibility:** Environment



**Ward(s) affected:** Cowley Marsh

**Report Approved by:** Imogen Wooder, Legal and Democratic Services (17.03.06)



**Policy Framework:** The proposals fit in to the Council's Vision and Strategic Aims



- providing more and improved affordable leisure activities
- improving the environments where we live and work
- making Oxford a safer city
- improving dialogue and consultation



**Recommendation(s):**



- That the Committee approves the allocation of £55,000 to new playground equipment in Cowley Marsh Recreation Ground and £15,000 to the Barracks Lane Community Garden scheme.
- That further research is approved into the potential for a skate park in Cowley Marsh Recreation Ground.



## **Background and context**

1. Cowley Marsh Recreation Ground is a large area of open space to the North of Marsh Road. The majority of the land is owned by Oxford City Council, although the North-West corner is leased from the County Council and maintained by the City Council.
2. The site consists of two senior adult football pitches, one junior pitch, one mini pitch and a cricket wicket. The Eastern corner of the Recreation Ground consists of a children's playground, a street sports site and tennis courts. To the South West, a small car park offers limited parking for the site. A council owned nature reserve adjoins the site to the East.
3. A community garden to the East of the recreation ground (at the end of Barracks Lane) has also been highlighted for development by a local charity.
4. Consultation suggests that the most popular activities for local people in the park are walking, relaxing, using the playground and cycling (see Appendix 1). The park's sports facilities are used by large numbers of organised teams from across the city (see Appendix 2).
5. A scheme for improvements to recreation facilities within the vicinity is included in the Capital Programme totalling £173,721.38. The scheme is funded by developer contributions received from Berkeley Homes, for the redevelopment of the former Oxford Bus Garage Site.
6. A walkabout took place in September 2005 with key local groups, Councillors and parks officers. This generated the initial ideas that local people were consulted on.

## **Details of who was consulted**

7. A questionnaire was sent to 23 roads within a 600m buffer zone around the Recreation Ground (as recommended by the National Playing Field Association). It was also sent to key local community groups, schools, charities, residents associations, religious groups and interest groups. A press release was sent to local media and displayed on the council website, and an online survey was created. In all, 386 replies were received.
8. People were consulted on
  - Resurfacing the tennis courts and replacing the nets
  - Providing a small skate park
  - Funding the Barracks Lane community garden
  - Providing an all-weather sports pitch
  - Upgrading the surface and lighting in the car park
  - Installing more dog bins and litter bins
  - Creating more places to sit.

9. They were also asked for their views on new playground equipment, and whether they would support moving the playground to make it more visible.

## Results of the consultation

10. The highest priority for respondents was to create a small skate park in Cowley Marsh Recreation Ground. 43% of all respondents thought it was a high priority, although a large proportion of these currently don't visit the park (see Appendix 3). Consultation with the Oxford Wheels Project, a registered charity, suggests that Cowley Marsh would be an ideal location for a skate park due to its size, distance from nearby houses and local transport links. They suggested that skaters would travel significant distances to use a skate park.
11. Young people believed Oxford was behind many other cities in its provision of such facilities. As a result, respondents suggested that another *small* skate park in Oxford would be of limited appeal. Many respondents indicated that they would be unlikely to use the site unless it differed from the other skate facilities in the city. Oxford Wheels Project would be happy to work with the City Council and apply for further funding if a skate park was approved. Potential locations are included in Appendix 4.
12. The next most popular suggestions were to install more dog bins (35%) and places to sit (33%).
13. Over 120 people (32.6%) believed that a community garden in Barracks Lane would be a high priority for the area.
14. Although many people (37%) supported plans to move the playground nearer the car park, a significant number of comments opposed the move, citing increased danger and pollution from cars.
15. The majority of respondents chose option C for the play equipment. The majority of children (under 18) chose option B.
16. Many people left extra comments on their responses. The most popular subjects were further support for a skate park (69 comments), not moving the playground (24 comments), planting more shrubs (20 comments) and improving safety (20 comments). Safety was a major concern, with 13 people wanting an increased staff presence at the park, and 9 people wanting improved lighting and CCTV.
17. The scheme people thought was the lowest priority was the installation of an all-weather sports pitch (31% thought it was a low priority; see Appendix 3). Oxford Community School are keen to support such a project, however, and have offered land within their grounds for an all weather pitch. Such a solution would provide more security for the pitch, as well as staff to maintain the pitch.

## Recommendations

18. The committee is recommended to approve further research into the construction of a skate park in Cowley Marsh Recreation Ground. The Council's 'open spaces strategy' highlights the need for providing more teenage recreation facilities in the city, and this would address such a need. Although support was high, however, many people who supported it currently don't use the recreation ground. The use of an online survey potentially allowed responses from anyone in Oxford, and it is recommended that local people be specifically consulted on skate facilities. Due to previous problems with skate facilities in Aristotle Lane, it is recommended that research is extensive. As well as further consultation, sound tests should be carried out with Environmental Health to ascertain the suitability of the site.
19. It is recommended that new seats, bins and dog bins be installed in the park.
20. Given such support for a community garden, it is recommended that the committee designates Section 106 funding to the project. The Barracks Lane Community Garden Project needs £70,000 in total. They have applied for £45,000 from external sources, and are seeking £15,000 from the City Council. Any allocation should be dependent on BLCGP confirming the details of public access to the garden.
21. It is recommended that the play area be moved slightly towards the car park to increase its visibility, but to retain a good distance for safety reasons. A path should be constructed from the car park to the new play area. The location of the new playground will be dependent on further research into a skate park and all-weather pitch.
22. Due to the number of comments asking for equipment for younger children, it is recommended that option B is approved.
23. As a result of the extra comments, it is recommended that more shrubs are planted in Autumn 2006.
24. Safety should be considered carefully at the site, as it is clearly a major concern. The new park rangers should be alerted to the results of the consultation, and patrols increased over summer. Funding is not sufficient to lock the park, but lighting could be considered if future funding becomes available.
25. If Oxford Community School can prove that an all-weather sports pitch facility on their land would be open to the local community, it is recommended that the committee offers support to them for such a development. This support would be subject to further negotiations with the school, which would look to apply for further funding from external sources.

Should the committee wish to allocate section 106 money to this scheme, it is recommended that it awaits the results of research into a potential skate park.

### **Financial implications**

26. A scheme for improvements to Cowley Marsh Recreation Ground is included in the Capital Programme totaling £173,721.38. The scheme is funded by developer contributions received from Berkeley Homes, for the redevelopment of the former Oxford Bus Garage Site. The contribution consists of
- £53,510.07 - Play Area Contribution, to provide a play area in a position as near as possible to the land together with any necessary pedestrian access from the land to the play area recreation/improvements.
  - £120,211.31 - Recreation Contribution, towards provision of recreation facilities within vicinity.
27. As expenditure would be revenue the contributions would be transferred to the Cowley Area Committee account to fund the scheme.
28. Playground option 'B' would cost £55,500. If this was chosen, the committee should then decide how the remaining £118,221.38 be spent.
29. It is recommended that £15,000 is allocated to the Barracks Lane Community Garden Project.
30. Additional funding decisions will be dependent on further consultation into the main options highlighted above.
31. There is no extra funding for this project in the Parks revenue budget.
32. The Planning Policy Manager confirms that the expenditure of the developer contributions on the playground and Barracks Lane Community Garden is consistent with the terms of the legal agreements.

### **List of appendices**

- Appendix one – Current use of the Recreation Ground
- Appendix two – Football teams currently using the park
- Appendix three – Questionnaire results
- Appendix four – Potential skate park locations
- Appendix five - Extra comments

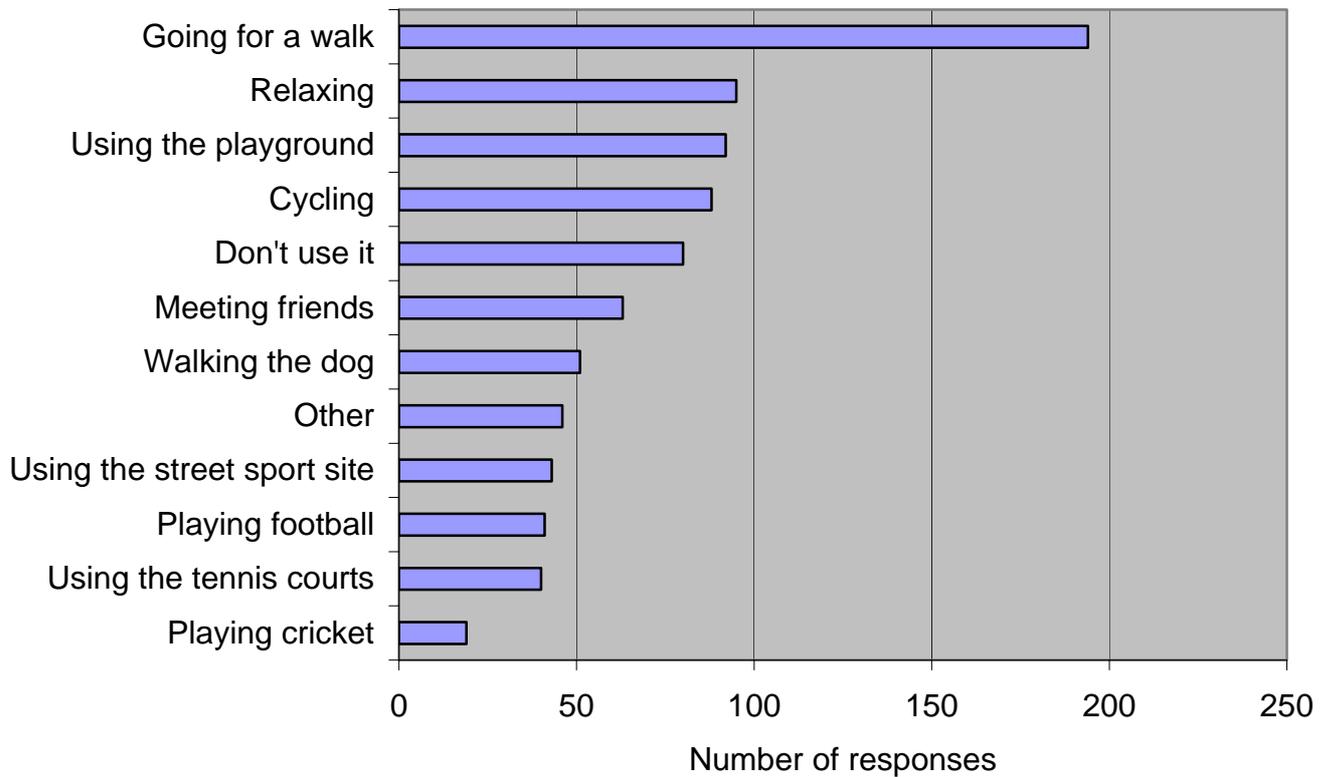
### **Background papers**

- Legal agreements relating to the former Oxford Bus garage site at 395 Cowley Road (00/1328/FUL)

### **Name and contact details of author:**

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## Appendix 1 – Use of the Recreation Ground



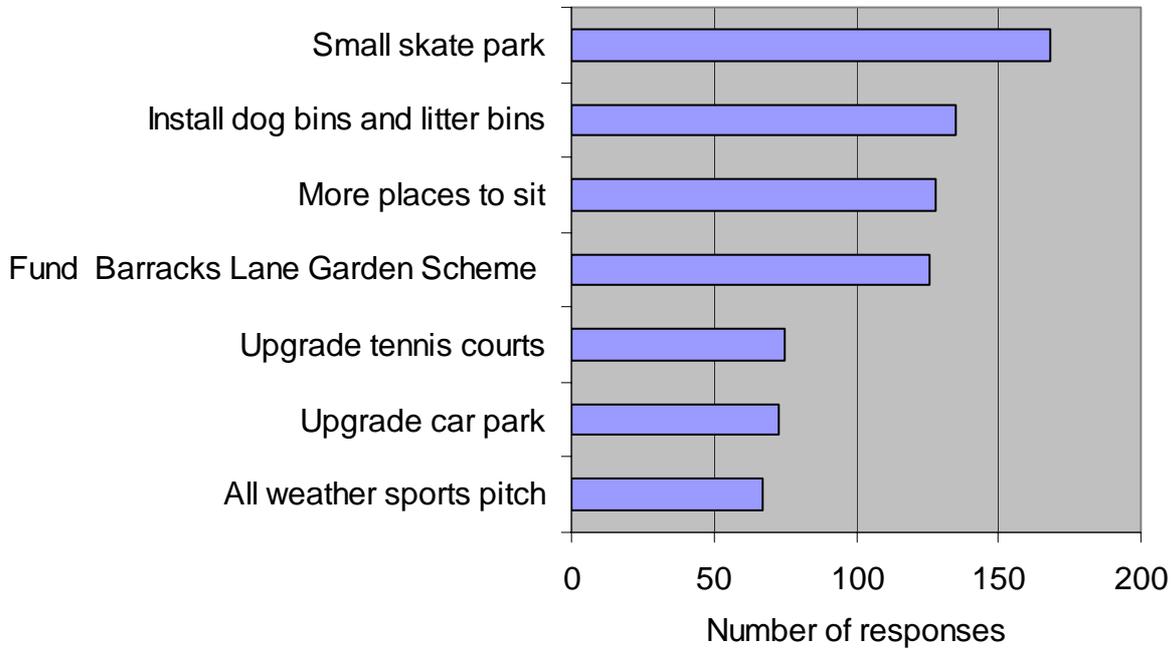
## Appendix 2 – Football teams booking the park (past 3 months)

Afghan Refugee Team	Florence Park Boys U8s	Nominet Uk	Oxford Irish U13s
Cowley OMH	Florence Park Boys U9s	Oxfam	Oxford Irish U15s
Donnington Old Boys	Individual	Oxford Irish	Oxford Irish U7s
Florence Park Boys U10s	Iffley Harriers	Oxford Irish Girls U12's	Oxford Korean Society
Florence Park Boys U11s	Keble	Oxford Irish Girls U14s	Oxford United Ladies
Florence Park Boys U12s	Kings School Oxford	Oxford Irish U10s	Riverside FC
Florence Park Boys U13s	Leys Community Church	Oxford Irish U11s	Said Business School
Florence Park Boys U14s	Individual	Oxford Irish U12s	

## Appendix 3 – Questionnaire results

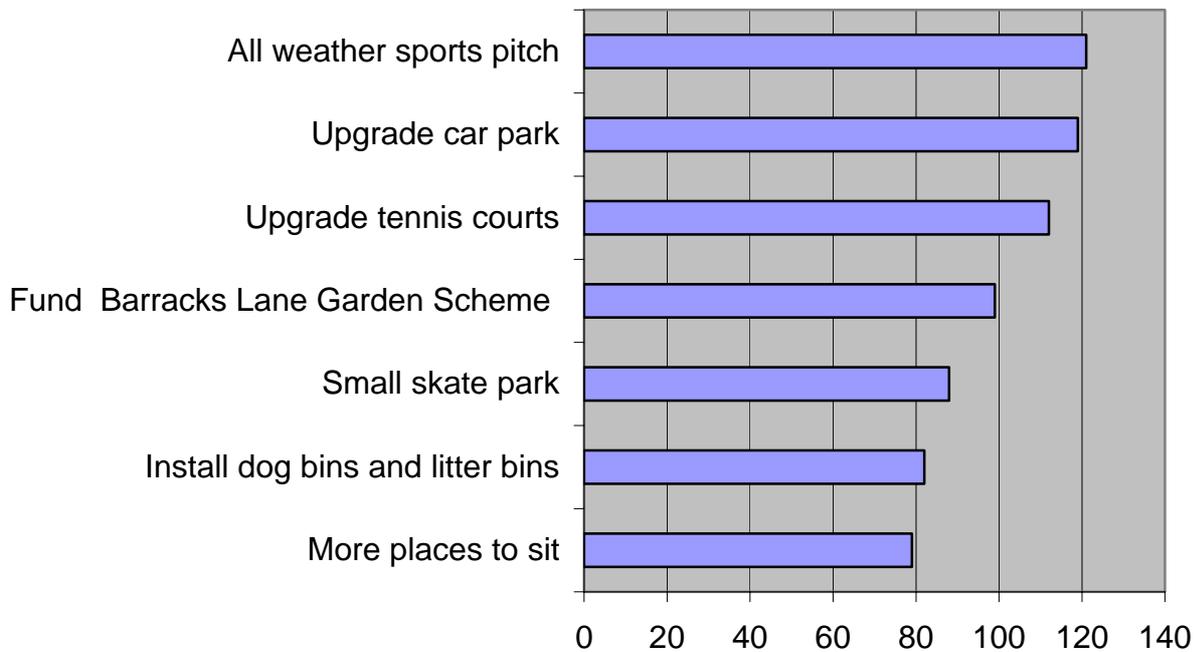
What is a high priority for the Recreation Ground?

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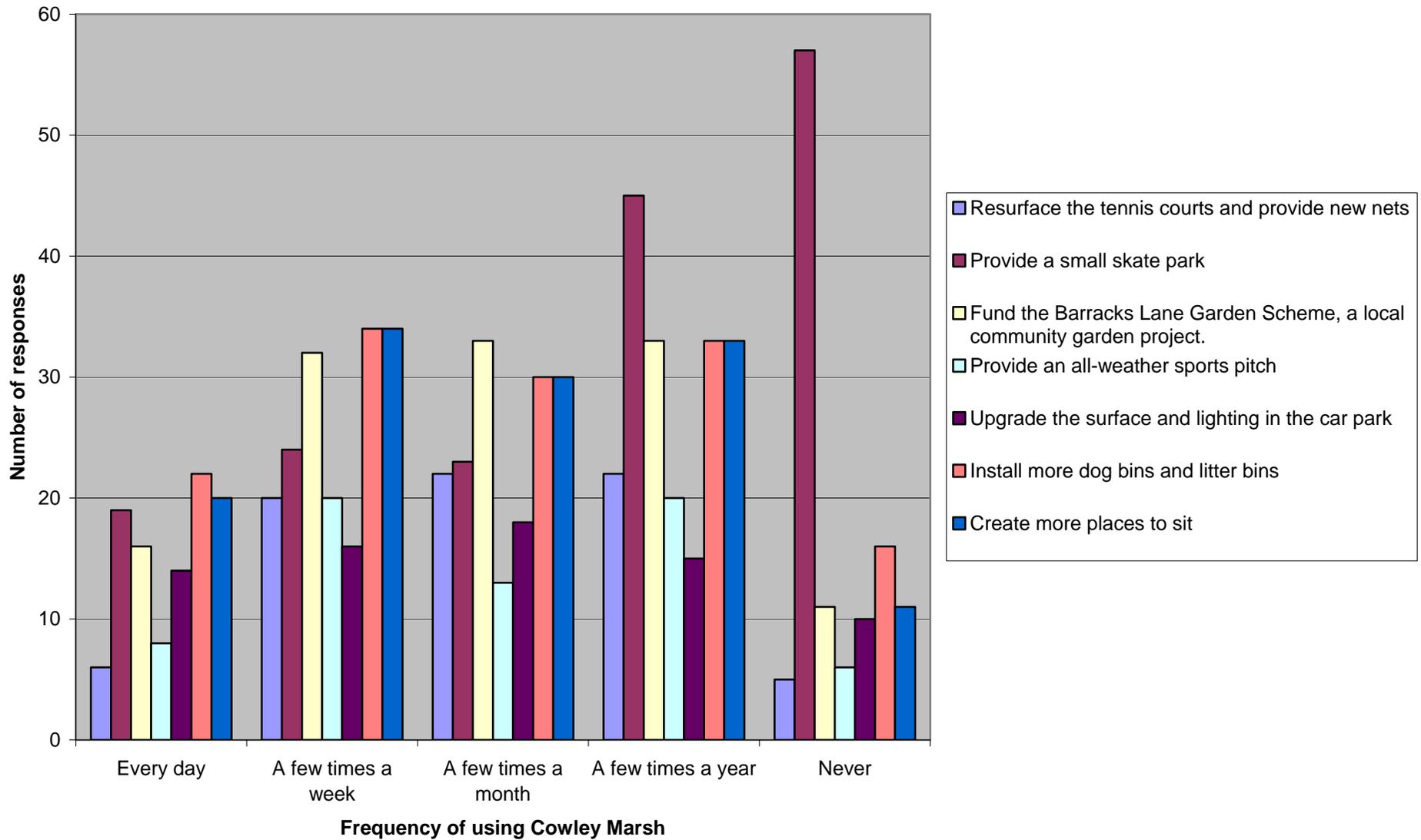


What is a low priority for the Recreation Ground?

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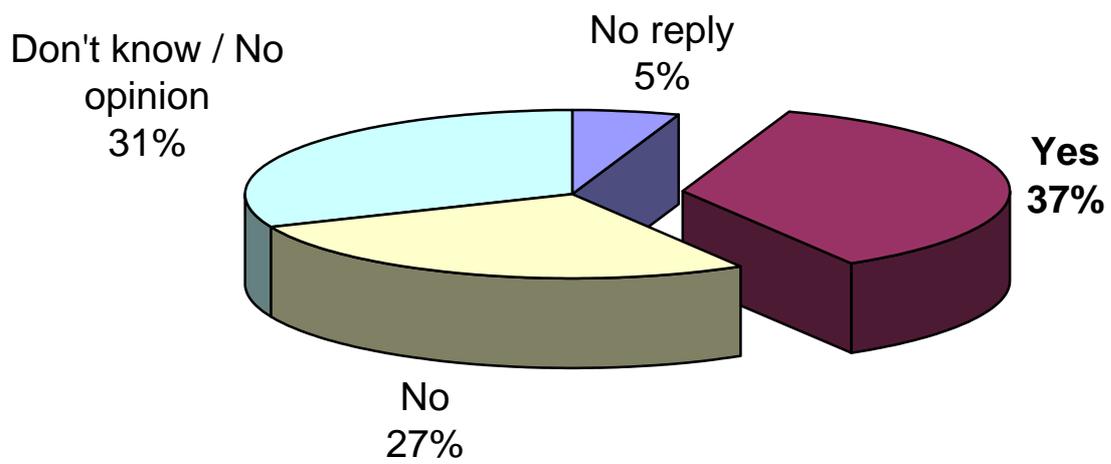
What is a high priority for the Recreation Ground? (results by frequency of use)





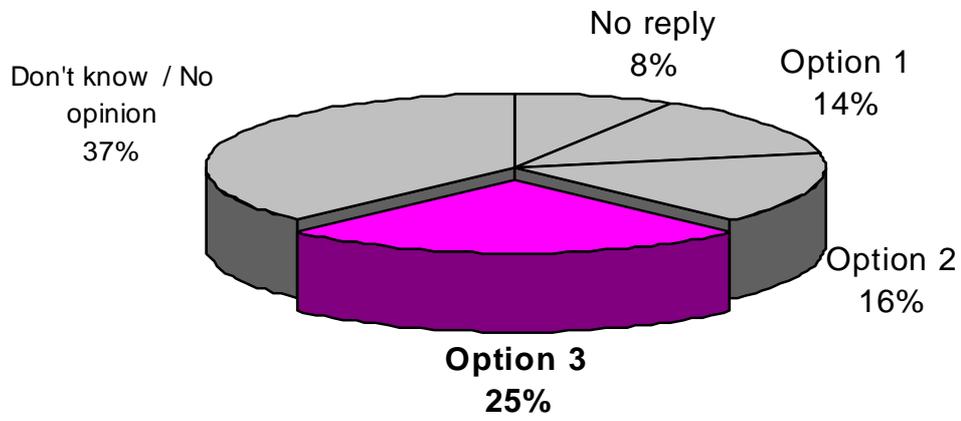
# Should the playground be moved?

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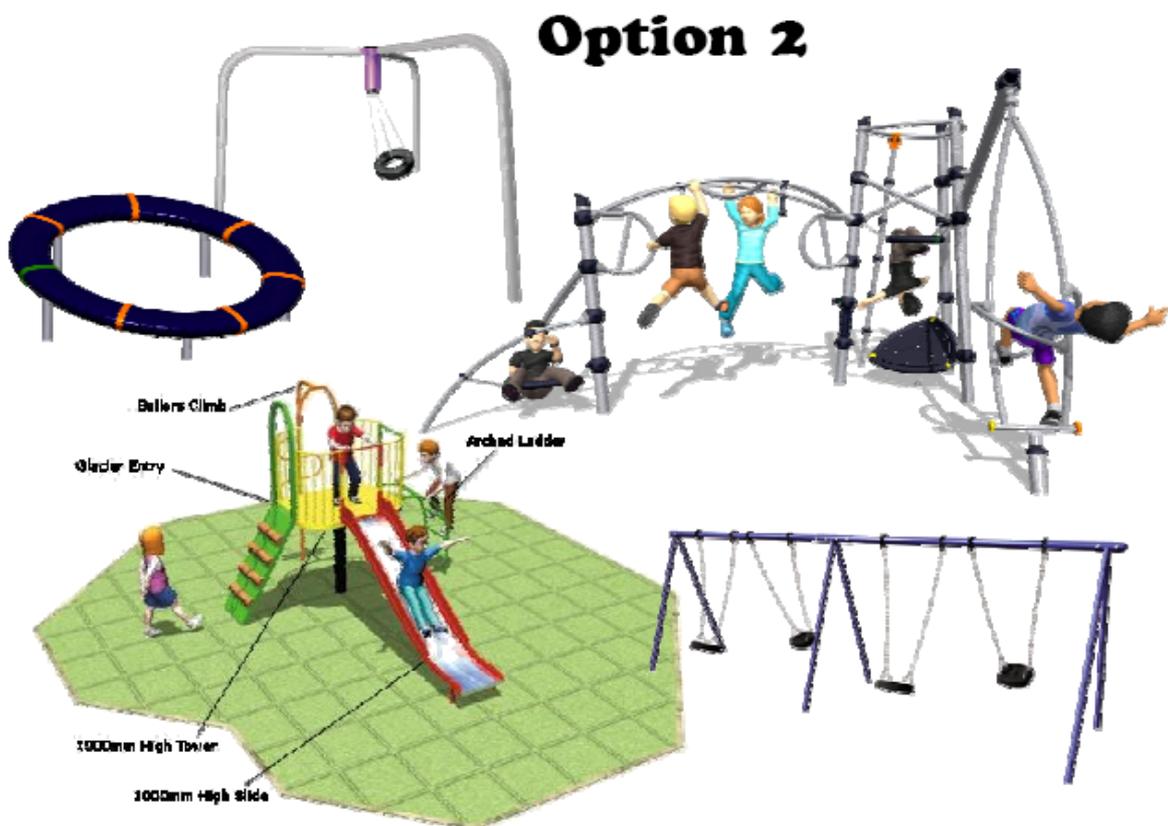
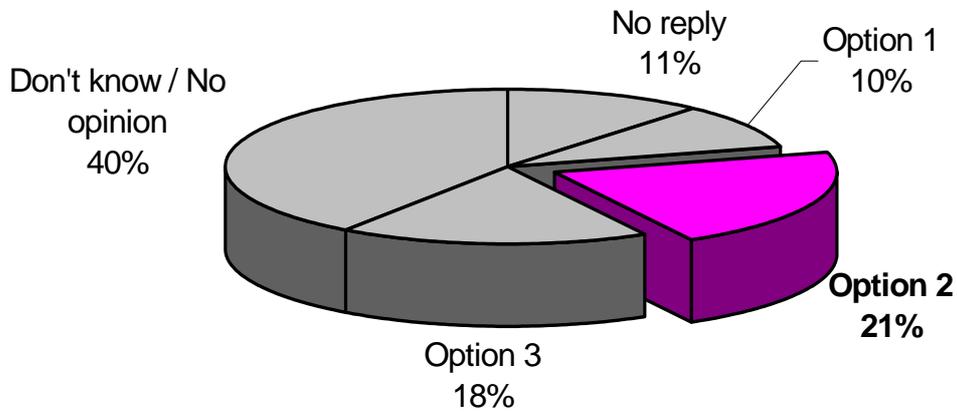
Which is your favourite playground equipment?

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Which is your favourite playground equipment? (Under 18s)

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# Appendix 4 – Potential skate park locations

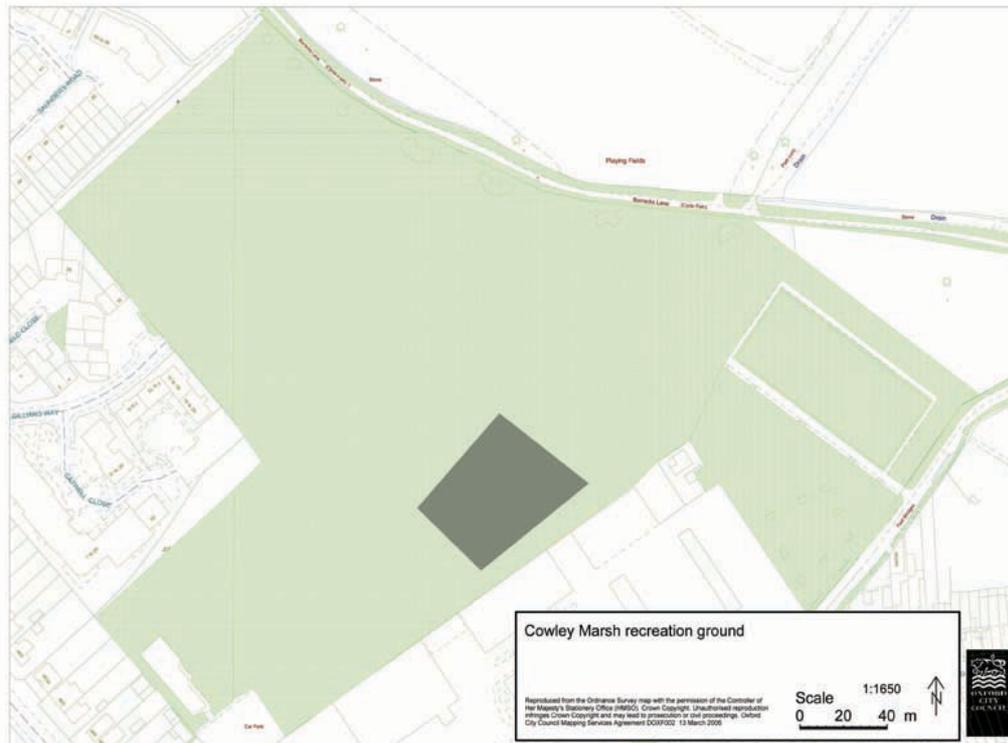
## Option 1

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## Option 2

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## Appendix 5 – Extra comments

