



## The Leith Links Ask Final Report

### Background

The Leith Links Ask aimed to gauge the level of public support for ten different proposals that would improve Leith Links.

The proposals were based on a study conducted by Cairns ICL that was commissioned by the City Of Edinburgh Council and completed in February 2007. It was felt that a wider consultation process was needed to identify which improvement proposals should be prioritised in future development plans.

Greener Leith designed the consultation process in consultation with key council staff, and delivered the project with funding from a Leith Neighbourhood Partnership Grant.

People were able to vote from the 14<sup>th</sup> of May to the 4<sup>th</sup> of August 2008.

### The Process

The main aim of the process was to engage with as many people as possible. Consequently a simple voting process was agreed with participants asked to vote for their favourite 3 proposals, out a possible 10.

A leaflet was produced, which included a tear-off free-post voting slip.

In order to bring the proposals to life, 10 short YouTube video clips were produced, 1 for each proposal. These were put on a specially designed website, where people could view the clips and find out more about each proposal. An on-line interactive map was produced that allowed visitors to get a feel for the areas affected by the various proposals. Visitors to the site were also able to comment on the proposals and then vote.

Greener Leith volunteers were involved in the filming and production of the video clips, working with the support of a locally based professional film maker. The clips aimed for a 50/50 mix between local residents and 'experts' on each project proposal.

Participants who voted on-line were also asked to indicate whether they regarded each proposal as a 'high priority', 'low priority' or one that 'shouldn't go ahead.' This was to try to gauge whether particular proposals were contentious or controversial.

Participants who voted on-line were also asked for their post code, in order to identify where most of the participants lived. Lastly, on-line voters were also given the option of leaving their email address in order to receive updates from the various organisations.

The project was promoted in the local press, on the Greener Leith website, on Youtube, in local community centres, and at a stall held during the Leith Festival Gala Day. Leaflets were also hand delivered by Greener Leith to households near Leith Links. In total 1000 leaflets were distributed locally.

The project was also promoted by a number of local 'bloggers' and on local internet message boards. The project was also advertised online using Google and Facebook. During the survey period, the site received more than 1028 unique visitors and each video clip was viewed up to 300 times.

## **The Results**

In total 550 people voted. 197 votes were received on-line, with the remaining votes submitted by post.

Table 1, below shows the improvement proposals ranked in order of popularity.

**Table 1 – Project Proposals ranked by total votes.**

<b>Childrens Play Areas</b>	<b>263</b>
<b>Leith Gardens</b>	<b>246</b>
<b>Pavilion Cafe/ Restaurant</b>	<b>244</b>
<b>Wildflowers/ Mini Nature Reser</b>	<b>217</b>
<b>Infrastructure Improvements</b>	<b>173</b>
<b>Leith Football/Rugby Pavillion</b>	<b>166</b>
<b>Tennis Centre</b>	<b>146</b>
<b>Golf and Leith Links</b>	<b>85</b>
<b>Lawn Bowls</b>	<b>61</b>
<b>Cricket Facilities</b>	<b>47</b>

The results show a considerable disparity between the most popular proposals and the least popular proposals. It is interesting to note a considerable support for improvements to the Childrens Play Facilities, Leith Gardens and Pavilion Cafe proposals.

Perhaps it is unsurprising that sports facilities tend to appeal to a smaller audience.

Turning to the second question that only on-line voters were asked, the results are in table 2, below. 192 voters answered this question.

**Table 2 – Voter Priority for Proposals, expressed as a percentage.**

	<b>High Priority</b>	<b>Low Priority</b>	<b>Shouldn't go ahead</b>
<b>Leith Gardens</b>	<b>64.2</b>	<b>30.9</b>	<b>4.9</b>
<b>Tennis Centre</b>	<b>52.5</b>	<b>39.5</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>Pavillion Restaurant and Cafe</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>34.1</b>	<b>15.9</b>
<b>Lawn Bowls Centre</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>60.8</b>	<b>20.3</b>
<b>Infrastructure Improvements</b>	<b>80.1</b>	<b>17.5</b>	<b>2.4</b>
<b>Children's Play Areas</b>	<b>66.3</b>	<b>30.9</b>	<b>2.9</b>
<b>Wildflowers and Mini Nature Reserves</b>	<b>56.9</b>	<b>34.7</b>	<b>8.4</b>
<b>Leith Football and Rugby Pavillion</b>	<b>44.3</b>	<b>43.7</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>Leith Links Cricket Facilities</b>	<b>19.9</b>	<b>57.1</b>	<b>23.1</b>
<b>Golf And Leith Links</b>	<b>23.2</b>	<b>38.7</b>	<b>38.1</b>

These results provide more of an insight into public perception of the project proposals. It is interesting to note that a majority of people view the top 2 proposals, The Children's Play Areas and Leith Gardens as a high priority. There is also little opposition to either of these proposals, with very few people indicating that they felt they shouldn't go ahead.

However, despite coming third in the overall voting, there seems to be less agreement on the Café proposal, with 15.9% of voters suggesting they think this proposal shouldn't go ahead at all. Whilst making the video clips we discovered a degree of loyalty to Bijou – an established café on the edge of Leith Links, and some residents were concerned that there may not be enough trade to support more cafés in the area.

This contrasts with the proposal to improve the infrastructure on the Links where there seemed to be a great deal of agreement that this was a high priority project, even if less people voted for the project overall. We suggest this project may have received less votes overall for two reasons. Firstly, 'infrastructure improvements' sounds somewhat technical and some voters may not have understood what was meant by this proposal. Secondly, some of the informal feedback we had during the Leith Links Gala Day stall was that people felt that it was something that should 'just happen anyway.'

Broadly speaking there was a consensus between the two questions; the top 5 projects in terms of votes were also those regarded by a majority of people as 'high priority' projects, even if the Cafe/Restaurant project stands out as one that is slightly more controversial.

The bottom five projects in terms of votes were all projects related to sports facilities. Of these projects, it is interesting that there is more consensus that the Tennis Centre should go ahead as a 'High Priority' than the Football and Rugby Facilities.

This is perhaps because some local residents feel football and rugby 'already takes up too much of the park.' A number of local residents we spoke to also felt that it was a great shame that the tennis facilities had been taken away, and couldn't understand why the council had not reinstated them, when other parks, like Inverleith, had received investment in similar facilities. This point was raised by several residents interviewed by the video production volunteers. The derelict tennis courts were unanimously viewed as a wasted opportunity and an eyesore.

This said, football is clearly a popular use of Leith Links, and of all the sports projects, this proposal received the most votes overall. 44.3% of the respondents also viewed improvements to the Football facilities as a high priority.

Notably, more than a third of respondents regarded the development of a permanent golf course on Leith Links as something that shouldn't go ahead. A similar number of people indicated that this project was a Low priority. This therefore, suggests that this project has the least support, and would be the most controversial, were it to go ahead.

Lastly, it should be noted that the postcode data collected from on-line voters indicated that 90% of respondents lived in Leith or North Edinburgh.

## **Conclusions**

It is clear that there is broad public support for improvements to the play facilities and more diverse planting in the form of both 'formal gardens' as well as spaces for wildlife. It is also clear that there is a broad consensus in support of improvements to the park infrastructure.

The Pavillion Cafe proposal and the Football/Rugby proposal are in some ways linked, as the ICL masterplan originally suggested that the Pavillion Cafe could be developed in the Leith AFC pavilion on the West Links. This could not take place without a renewed changing facility elsewhere on the links. This project has shown that there is a relatively high degree of support for both of these projects.

Of all the sports related projects we note that the Tennis centre is viewed as the 'highest priority' facility to develop.

The results of this project suggest that the only proposal that does not command significant public support is the development of a permanent golf course on the East links.

## **Next Steps**

The results of this project should inform a development plan and funding strategy for Leith Links that focusses on delivering the higher priority projects.

Local partners should work together, aiming to deliver some 'easy wins,' that are not too expensive. Low costs actions that could be considered:

- Allowing some areas of the park to develop as wild flower meadows, by reducing the frequency of grass cutting.
- Repairing or removing damaged fences, bins and signage.
- Treating graffiti around the park boundaries.
- Assess scope for small community planting projects similar to the Berry Hedge project that Greener Leith undertook Pilrig Park in the spring of 2008.

Greener Leith will publish this report on both the Leith Links Ask website and the Greener Leith website. The report will also be sent to key organisations and local elected representatives in the Leith Area.

## Contact

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