

South Chingford Flood Mitigation & Wildlife Habitat Improvement Project

**Memorial Park
Larkwood Playing Field
Rolls Sports Ground**

Engagement Report

March 2022

1. Summary

The South Chingford Flood Mitigation and Wildlife Habitat Improvement Project is split over three open spaces in the South Chingford area – Rolls Sports Ground, Memorial Park and Larkwood Playing Field. These projects have been developed to reduce the risk of flooding to people and property. The project will completely remove 64 properties from flood risk due to a storm event which has a 5% chance of occurring each year; and will remove 72 properties from a storm event, which has a 1% chance of occurring each year. Another 821 properties will also receive a reduction in flood risk. Over the design life (100 years), the works are predicted to reduce flood risk damage by £5.1 million. To implement the works, the project has been awarded significant funding by the government Flood Defence Grant in Aid programme with supplementary funding from the London Borough of Waltham Forest (LBWF). Additional benefits include enhanced biodiversity and amenity value of the sites.

Thames21 facilitated preliminary engagement of 'Friends' groups, local councillors and open spaces users to assess public opinion regarding this scheme in July 2021 for Memorial Park and Larkwood Playing Field; and in March 2022 for Rolls Sports Ground. This comprised online and face to face meetings with key stakeholders; and a two-hour drop in session located within each project area to engage with the local community. In addition, LBWF engaged with the sports clubs within Rolls Sports Ground. During the drop in sessions, open space users were invited to view plans of the proposals and flood maps; and discuss concerns or aspirations with project team members from Thames21 and LBWF. The local community were also encouraged to complete a feedback questionnaire, the results of which are outlined in this report.

The results of the questionnaires for Larkwood Playing Field show 84.6% of respondents support the proposed schemes and 84.6% consider the reduction of flood risk to be "very important". Also 61.5% of respondents considered improving biodiversity to be "very important".

The results of the questionnaires for Rolls Sports Ground show 85.7% of respondents support the proposed schemes and 84.6% consider the reduction of flood risk to be "very important". Also 81.0% of respondents consider improving biodiversity to be "very important".

The results of the questionnaires for Memorial Park show 95.2% of respondents support the proposed schemes and 90.5% consider the reduction of flood risk to be "very important". Also 71.4% of respondents consider improving biodiversity to be "very important".

Local Ward Councillors were all very supportive of the proposals, as were the Friends of Anslie and Larkwood Park and the Love South Chingford group. The West Essex Cricket & Tennis Club and West Essex Football Club were supportive of the scheme in Rolls Sports Ground, as the scheme will improve drainage and ground conditions, which will extend the playing season on pitches that currently become unusable due to waterlogging.

In Memorial Park, the Friends and several questionnaire respondents were keen to encourage public interaction within the proposed wetlands, including determining the wetlands as an education space for local schools, including the implementation of flora and fauna and a potential pond observation platform. Respondents were also keen to nurture ownership by involving local residents, particularly young people in wetland planting.

In Larkwood Playing Field, comments included desire for seating and bins around the wildflower meadow. Feedback amongst councillors, the Friends and questionnaire respondents indicated concerns that dense tree planting, combined with the proposed bund may create the impression of restricted lines of sight, therefore potentially making footpath users feel vulnerable. To mitigate this risk, planting on the bund will be appropriately specified by the design team.

In Rolls Sports Ground, comments endorsed the proposed improved drainage on the sports pitches. Five respondents requested more trees around the periphery and others asked for seating to facilitate interaction with the wildflower meadow. Other comments requested improvements to the entrances to the sports ground and formalisation of pathways to prevent informal short-cut paths that are detrimental to the pitches. One respondent expressed concerns regarding the proposed footbridge access, which they considered dangerous during matches and on dark evenings. Another

respondent outlined concern about the long term maintenance of the meadow, including litter removal.

Feedback from all sites reflected interest in becoming involved with maintenance of the schemes. In Memorial Park, nine respondents indicated they would like to take part in developing and maintaining the scheme with a further six indicating they maybe interested. In Larkwood Park three people expressed interest in developing and maintaining the scheme, with a further five indicating they maybe interested. In Rolls Sports Ground seven were interested in maintaining the scheme, with a further four indicating they maybe interested. Inviting and integrating interested stakeholders into development of the design and maintenance plans would be a key step to fostering a sense of local ownership of the sites.

Full results of the public engagement activities in Memorial Park, Larkwood Playing Field and Rolls Sports Ground are presented below. Due to the complexity of the scheme at Rolls Sports Ground, feasibility and site investigations were conducted at a later stage and then progressed to the engagement stage with the local community. Therefore, this report supersedes a previous report (issued August 2021), which only outlined the engagement at Memorial Park and Larkwood Playing Field.

2. Key Stakeholder Engagement (Councillors, Friends Groups & Sports Organisations)

In advance of the public drop-in sessions held in each project area, support and feedback of local councillors and 'Friends' groups (Memorial Park and Larkwood Playing Field) and resident sports clubs (Rolls Sports Ground) were sought and confirmed to be in the majority positive. Engagement occurred via online and face to face discussions where plans were presented and discussed. The engagement activities are listed in Figure 1.

Figure 1
Memorial Park and Larkwood Playing Field – Engagement Activities

Activity	Attendees	Location	Date
Presentation and discussion of the proposal for Memorial Park	Love South Chingford (LSC)	Memorial Park	19 July 2021
Presentation and discussion of the proposal for Larkwood Playing Field	Friends of Ainsle and Larks Woods (FOAL)	Online	19 July 2021
Presentation and discussion of the proposal for Memorial Park and Larkwood Playing Field	Cllr Moss and Cllr Saumarez	Online	19 July 2021
	Cllr Seesunkur	Online	21 July 2021
Public drop-in session to view and discuss the proposals	Public	Memorial Park & Larkwood Playing Field	25 July 2021
Discussion of the proposal for Rolls Sports Ground with sports clubs	West Essex Cricket and Tennis Club, West Essex FC	Online	21 February 2022
Public drop-in session to view and discuss the proposals	Public	Rolls Sports Ground	12 March 2022

Local Ward Councillors were all very supportive of the proposals for the sites The Friends of Anslie & Larkwood Playing Fields, the Love South Chingford group, West Essex Cricket & Tennis Club and West Essex Football Club confirmed support of the proposals and acknowledged the prospective benefits of the schemes. This key stakeholder support was imperative due to ownership and familiarity with the project locations; and have the ability to develop the schemes from a regular user perspective. Additionally, stakeholders and users have indicated they may be willing to assist

with ongoing care and maintenance of the scheme after installation. Specific comments from the friends and sports groups are outlined below.

3. Memorial Park: Results & Feedback

3.1 Questionnaire Results

During a two hour drop-in session at Memorial Park on 25 July 2021, twenty one questionnaires were completed by the local community. Key results are presented in Figure 2.

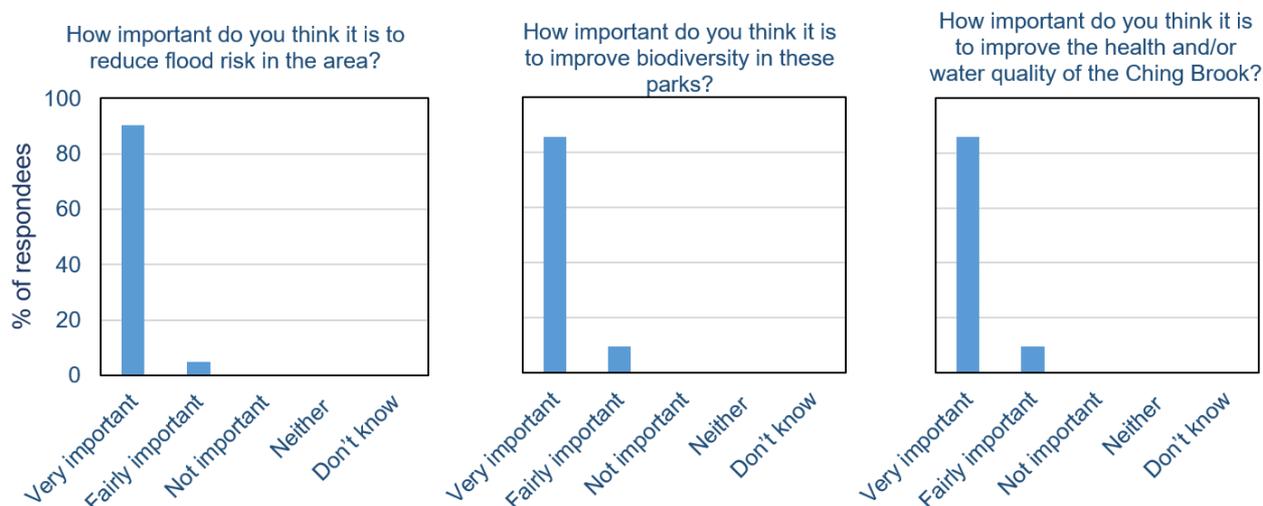
Figure 2
Memorial Park – Questionnaire Responses

	Do you support the proposal to reduce flood risk to properties in the area?	Were you aware of the potential flood risk in the area before this event?	Did you know water from this area runs to the Ching Brook?	Do you feel there is a lack of biodiversity in the area?	Would you like to take part in developing and maintaining the proposed scheme?	Are there any constraints or opportunities you would like to suggest?
Yes %	95.2	42.9	33.3	71.4	40.9	33.3
No %	0	52.4	61.9	9.5	22.7	52.4
Don't know %	0	0	0	14.3	27.3	9.5

The proposal for a wetland in Memorial Park to provide flood alleviation was strongly supported. 95.2% of people who completed the questionnaire (20 of the 21 people) responded “Yes”. One respondent did not interact with any of the questions, only with the free text boxes where participants could input comments and suggestions. There was no opposition to the scheme in the questionnaire responses. Comments in support from local park users outlined in the questionnaires include “*this is a great idea*” and “*this is a fantastic opportunity*” and “*I have no concerns losing open space as the pros your detail far outweigh this*”.

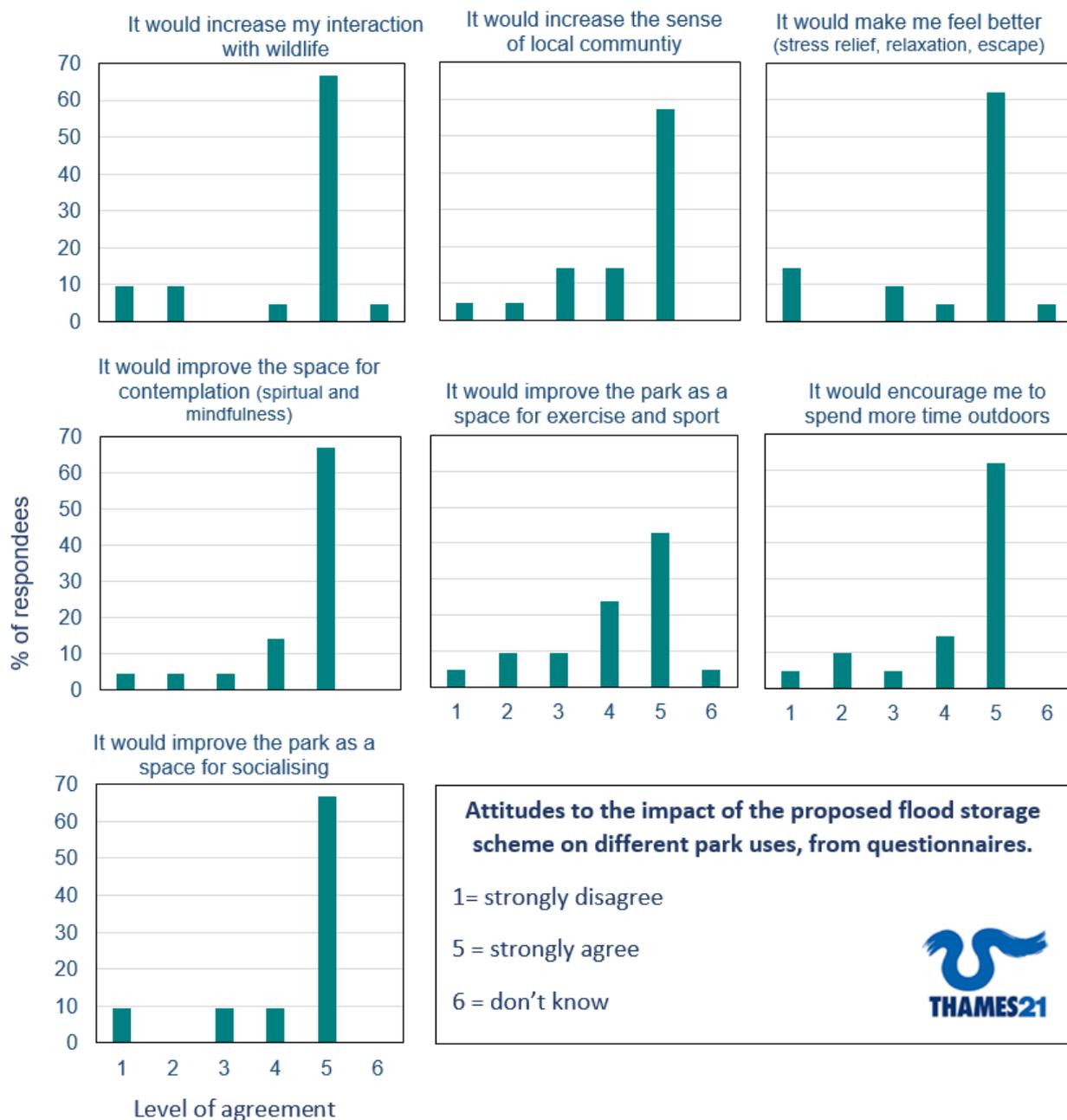
Most respondents were not aware of the flood risk in the area (52.4% unaware) or that the water drained from the park into the Ching Brook (61.9% unaware), however there was a strong impression that biodiversity in the area was lacking (71.4%). 40.9% of respondents were interested in participating further to develop plans and maintain the scheme after installation. 33% of participants had suggestions or further comments, discussed in the next section, and 9.5% were not yet sufficiently familiar with the proposals to comment at this time.

Figure 3
Memorial Park – Questionnaire Responses - Relative importance of flooding, biodiversity and water quality



All respondents considered reducing flood risk to be a “very important” or “fairly important” issue with 90.5% of respondents indicating that reducing flood risk was a “very important” issue (see Figure 3). Improving biodiversity in the park, river health and water quality of the Ching Brook was also considered either “very important” (85.7%) or “fairly important” (9.5%). No respondents considered these issues to be “not important”.

Figure 4
Memorial Park – Questionnaire Responses - Attitudes to the wider benefits of the on different types of recreational uses



The importance of being outdoors linked to mental and physical health is being increasingly recognised by the local community. Enhancing the amenity value of Memorial Park is one of the wider benefits of the scheme, and participants felt that the presence of a wetland flood storage feature would enhance different types of recreational park use, see Figure 4.

In particular 66.5% of respondents “strongly agree” that the scheme would increase their interaction with wildlife and improve the park for socialising and as a space for contemplation. 61.9% “strongly agree” that Memorial Park would make them feel better (stress relief, relaxation) and would encourage them to spend more time outside. 57.1% felt the flood scheme would increase the sense of local community, potentially by increasing opportunities for conversations in the park whilst

enjoying the wetland, and through volunteering in its maintenance and upkeep. One respondent indicated “strongly disagree” to all the questions in Figure 4, but as their comments were otherwise very supportive and they ticked “yes” to indicate they were in support of the proposal for a flood storage scheme in the park, it is possible that they misread the guidance and mistook 1 to mean “strongly agree”.

3.2 Memorial Park - Constraints and opportunities identified from public feedback

As indicated in Figure 2, 33.3% of people who completed the questionnaire also commented on opportunities and constraints around the proposal. A further 66.7% made suggestions for additional features and in the space inviting “any other comments”. This section presents feedback from questionnaires, discussions with the local councillors and the Love South Chingford Group.

The Love South Chingford group recognise the benefits of the proposals and are particularly keen to enable communities to interact with the wetlands, specifically through involving local schools and through site interpretation and signposting for flora and fauna information. In addition to this feedback, five questionnaires included requests to involve local schools in the planning and development stage and to facilitate use of the wetlands for educating children about wildlife and nature, including installing a pond dipping platform. One comment from a questionnaire outlined “*It would be great if there were future opportunities for outdoor education / forest school type activities in these new areas. Perhaps with links to local schools. As a mum I know many families who would love this! Family volunteering sessions run in future we would love to be involved*”.

Involvement of young people in planting the wetland to encourage ownership and making the wetlands accessible by creating public footpaths were also requested. Restoration of substandard benches and installation of new ones to enjoy the wetland was also requested.

However, another two park users commented that the safety of young children around open water was a concern. A careful balance must therefore be struck between safety and permitting access to the water for enjoyment and education purposes. In Thames21’s experience of previous projects, this has been achieved through a mix of planting and/or barriers to limit access to areas that are particularly steep or deep and through use of shallow gradients and planting within the wetland itself, which will be considered by the design team when finalising the project detailed design.

Four comments focused on provision for ongoing maintenance of the site including keeping it free of litter. One respondent suggested a camera to deter illegal dumping and littering. Interest from park users in participating in further development of plans and ongoing maintenance of the site was high (40.9%, Figure 2), therefore local community input will be valuable in future shaping of the scheme and maintenance.

Two questionnaire responses identified the proposal for the scheme as an opportunity to minimise the flooding that currently occurs in the vicinity of the gym and tennis courts, especially in winter. This was a frequent question during discussions with the public and it was made clear that the proposed scheme focuses on wider catchment issues, rather than resolving the more local pooling of water in the park. However, capturing these comments may support bids for further funding to address this issue. This is also the case with other comments unrelated to the delivery of the current proposal. In particular the disused toilets and pavilion in Memorial Park.

Eight questionnaires contained comments related to restoring the public toilets to good working order and to renovation of the pavilion into a café and/or community space with potential to host arts, yoga, gardening, and other activities. This is beyond the remit of the current scheme, but this level of interest could support the development of future proposals.

4. Larkswood Playing Field

4.1 Questionnaire Results

During a two hour drop-in session at Larkswood Playing Field, thirteen questionnaires were completed by the local community. This number is lower than from the morning session in Memorial Park due to very low footfall on account of adverse weather and extensive flooding. Key results are presented in Figure 5.

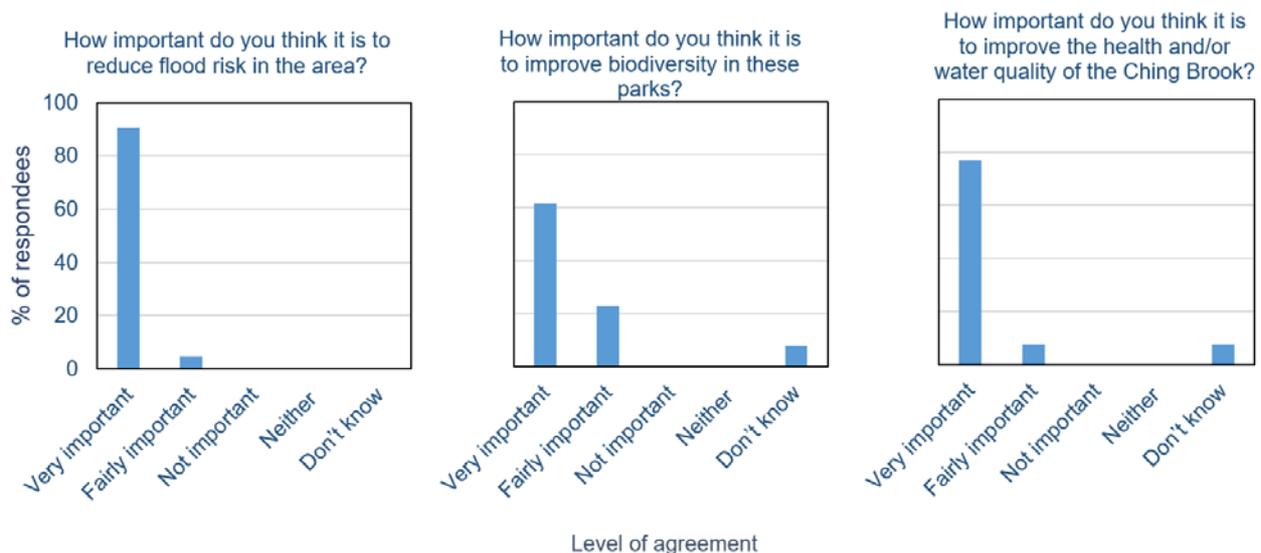
Figure 5:
Larkswood Playing Field – Questionnaire Responses

	Do you support the proposal to reduce flood risk to properties in the area?	Were you aware of the potential flood risk in the area before this event?	Did you know water from this area runs to the Ching Brook?	Do you feel there is a lack of biodiversity in the area?	Would you like to take part in developing and maintaining the proposed scheme?	Are there any constraints or opportunities you would like to suggest?
Yes %	84.6	46.2	30.8	23.1	23.1	38.5
No %	0	38.5	53.8	30.8	30.8	30.8
Don't know %	7.7	7.7	7.7	38.5	38.5	23.1

The proposal for a water retention bund and wildflower meadow in Larkswood Playing Fields to provide flood alleviation was strongly supported. 84.6% of people who completed the questionnaire (12 of the 13 people) responded “yes” and one indicated “maybe” (see Figure 5). No respondents indicated opposition to the scheme in their questionnaire responses.

Comments in support from local park users, lifted from the questionnaires include: “Any help to stop our gardens getting flooded” and “My garden floods whenever it rains heavily. It has got worse in the last 40 years we have lived here.” Applying to all three sites was the comment “this is a fantastic opportunity”.

Figure 6
Larkswood Playing Fields - The relative importance of flooding, biodiversity and water quality



There was an even split between respondents who were aware of the flood risk in the local area (46.2%) and those who were not aware or did not know (46.2%, see Figure 6), whilst the majority were not aware or did not know that water draining from the park flows into the Ching Brook (61.5%). Most respondents were not certain if there was lack of biodiversity in the area (38.5%), which may be due to the presence of a large woodland directly bordering the park. Consequently, a lower proportion felt biodiversity was lacking in the area (23.1%).

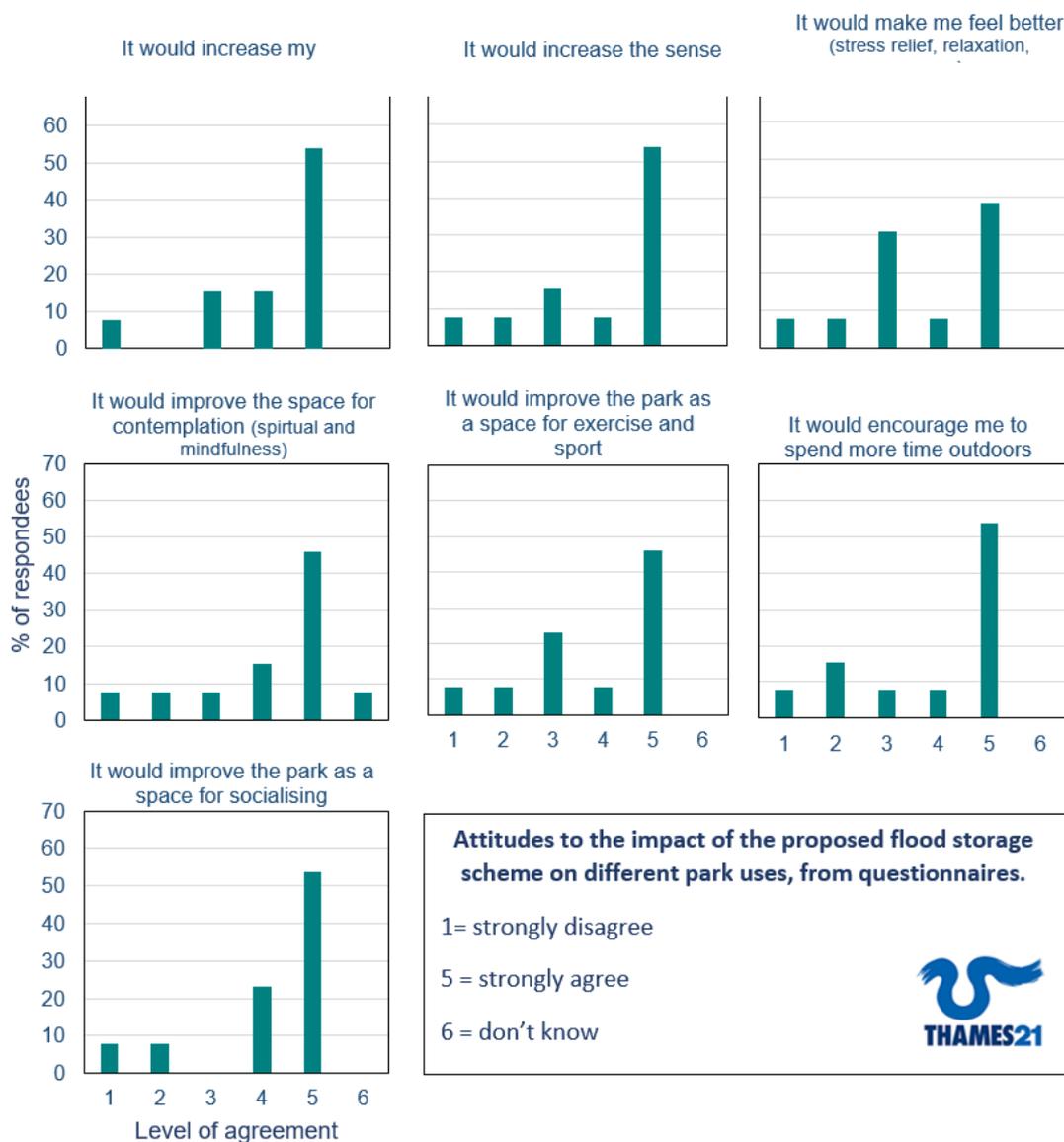
There was general interest for scheme and a willingness to engage further, with 23.1% of respondents interested in participating to develop plans and maintain the scheme after its installation. 28.5% of respondents had suggestions or further comments, discussed in the next section, whilst 23.1% were not yet sufficiently familiar with the proposals to comment at this time. Therefore the project team will consider coordinating future maintenance of the scheme with the local community if feasible.

All respondents considered reducing flood risk to be “very important” (84.6%) or “fairly important” (7.7%). Improving biodiversity in the park was considered “very important” by 61.5% and fairly important by 23.1% of respondents, with only one responding “don’t know”.

Improving river health and water quality of the Ching Brook was also considered either “very important” (76.9%) or “fairly important” (7.7%) with only one respondent being uncertain. There were no responses that considered these issues to be “not important” or “neither important nor unimportant”.

Increasingly, the importance of being outdoors to peoples mental and physical health is being recognised. Enhancing the amenity value of Larkswood Playing Field is one of the wider benefits of the flood storage scheme and overall participants felt that the presence of a wildflower meadow flood storage feature would enhance different types of recreational park use. In particular 53.8% of respondents “strongly agree” that the flood storage scheme would increase their interaction with wildlife, improve the park for socialising, increase the sense of community and encourage them to spend more time outdoors (see Figure 7). 46.2% of those questioned felt that the wildflower meadow would improve the space as a place for contemplation but views were more spread as to whether the wildflower meadow would facilitate relaxation and escape or improve the park for exercise. Questionnaires from Larkswood Playing Field indicated a higher frequency of “don’t know” responses compared to Memorial Park.

Figure 7
Larkswood Playing Field - Questionnaire Responses - Attitudes to the wider benefits of the on different types of recreational uses



4.2 Larkswood Playing Field - Constraints and opportunities identified from public feedback

In total 76.9% of those who completed a questionnaire identified opportunities and constraints concerning the scheme or suggested additional features in the “any other comments” box. This section presents feedback from questionnaires, discussions with the local councillors and the Friends of Ainslie & Larkswood Playing Field (FOAL) group.

Overall, the FOAL group were very supportive and could see many benefits in the scheme. They also highlighted some elements that should be considered in more detail, in particular about tree planting and lines of sight. These same concerns were also identified by the local councillors, and from conversations with members of the public in the park, two of whom mentioned it as feedback in the questionnaire. Trees were previously planted in Larkswood Playing Field, but it appears that there were a number of complains due to perceptions that it created a dark and potentially dangerous area, resulting in removal of the trees. Suggestions from the public included not to plant too close to the path due to concerns that in conjunction with the bund lines of sight may be reduced and therefore create feelings of being unsafe. However, feedback from one questionnaire was a requested “*more trees*” and another “*My husband and I were so saddened to see the planted trees in Larkswood vandalised are there any plans to prevent similar events?*”

Also, three questionnaires requested seating to facilitate enjoyment of the wildflower meadow, and also bins.

5. Rolls Sports Ground

5.1 Questionnaire Results

During a two hour drop-in session at Rolls Sports Ground, twenty one questionnaires were completed by the local community. Key results are presented in Figure 8 below.

Figure 8
Rolls Sports Ground – Questionnaire Responses

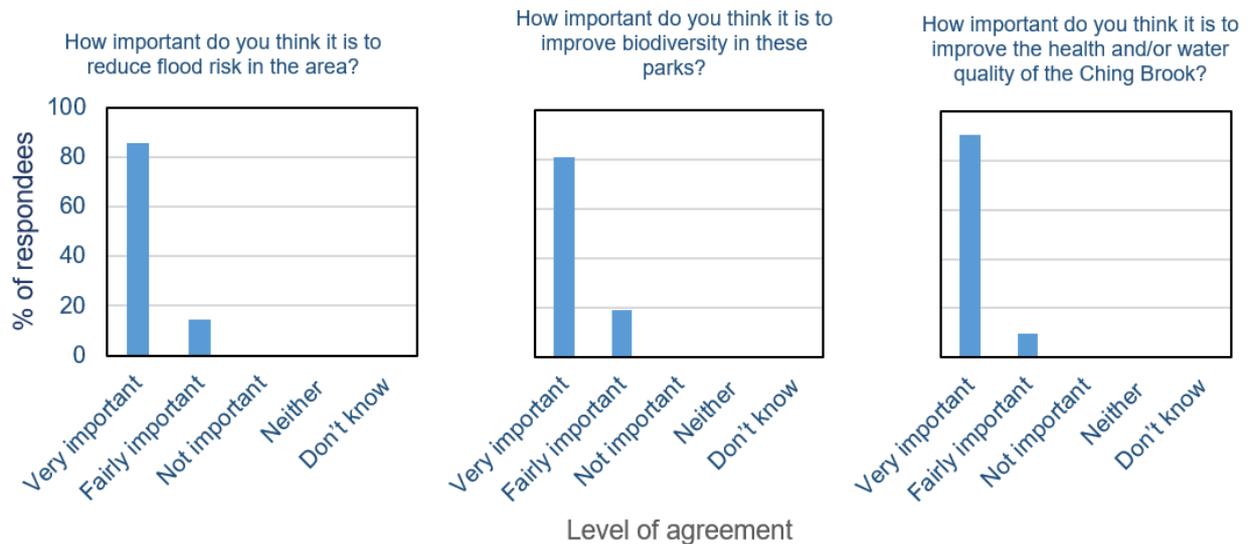
	Were you aware of the potential flood risk in the area before this event?	Did you know water from this area runs to the Ching Brook?	Do you feel there is a lack of biodiversity in the area?	Would you like to take part in developing and maintaining the proposed scheme?	Are there any constraints or opportunities you would like to suggest?
Yes %	52.4	47.6	71.4	33.3	42.9
No %	42.9	47.6	14.3	28.6	42.9
Don't know %	4.8	4.8	14.3	19.0	4.8

71.4% of respondents felt there was a lack of biodiversity in the area indicating that this is an important issue to local park users. The proposal for a water retention bund, green wall and wildflower meadow in Rolls Sports Ground will diversify the habitat types present in the area and therefore should improve biodiversity, as well as provide flood alleviation. Waterlogging of pitches making them unplayable for several months of the year is an issue well known to the users of the sports grounds and comments in support from the questionnaires include: “*Rolls Field gets impassable with lots of rain so any help with improvements*” and “*I have been playing cricket for 20 years. Look forward to seeing the difference*”. Applying to all three sites was the comment “*this is a fantastic opportunity*”.

Awareness of localised waterlogging and drainage issues on Rolls Sports Ground extended to a slightly higher percentage of respondents who were aware of the wider flood risk in the local area (52.4%) compared with those who were not aware (42.9%). There was an equal split (47.6% each) between those who knew water draining from the park flows into the Ching Brook and those who did not know.

There was interest in the scheme and a willingness to engage further with 33.3% of respondees (7 participants) interested in participating to develop plans and maintain the scheme after its installation and 19.0% (5 people) unsure at this stage. Similarly, 66.7% of participants had suggestions or further comments, discussed in the next section, whilst 4.8% were not yet sufficiently familiar with the proposals to comment at this time and other participants left this question blank.

Figure 9:
Rolls Sports Ground - The relative importance of flooding, biodiversity and water quality



All respondents considered reducing flood risk to be either “very important” (85.7%) or “fairly important” (14.3%) issue, as illustrated in Figure 9. Improving biodiversity in the park was considered “very important” by 81.0% and fairly important by 19.0%. Improving river health and water quality of the Ching Brook was also considered either “very important” (90.5%) or “fairly important” (9.5%). No respondents considered these issues to be “not important” or “neither important nor unimportant” or “did not know”.

The importance of being outdoors to peoples mental and physical health is being recognised. Enhancing the amenity value of Rolls Sport Ground is one of the wider benefits of the flood storage scheme and overall participants felt that the presence of a wildflower meadow flood storage feature would enhance different types of recreational park use.

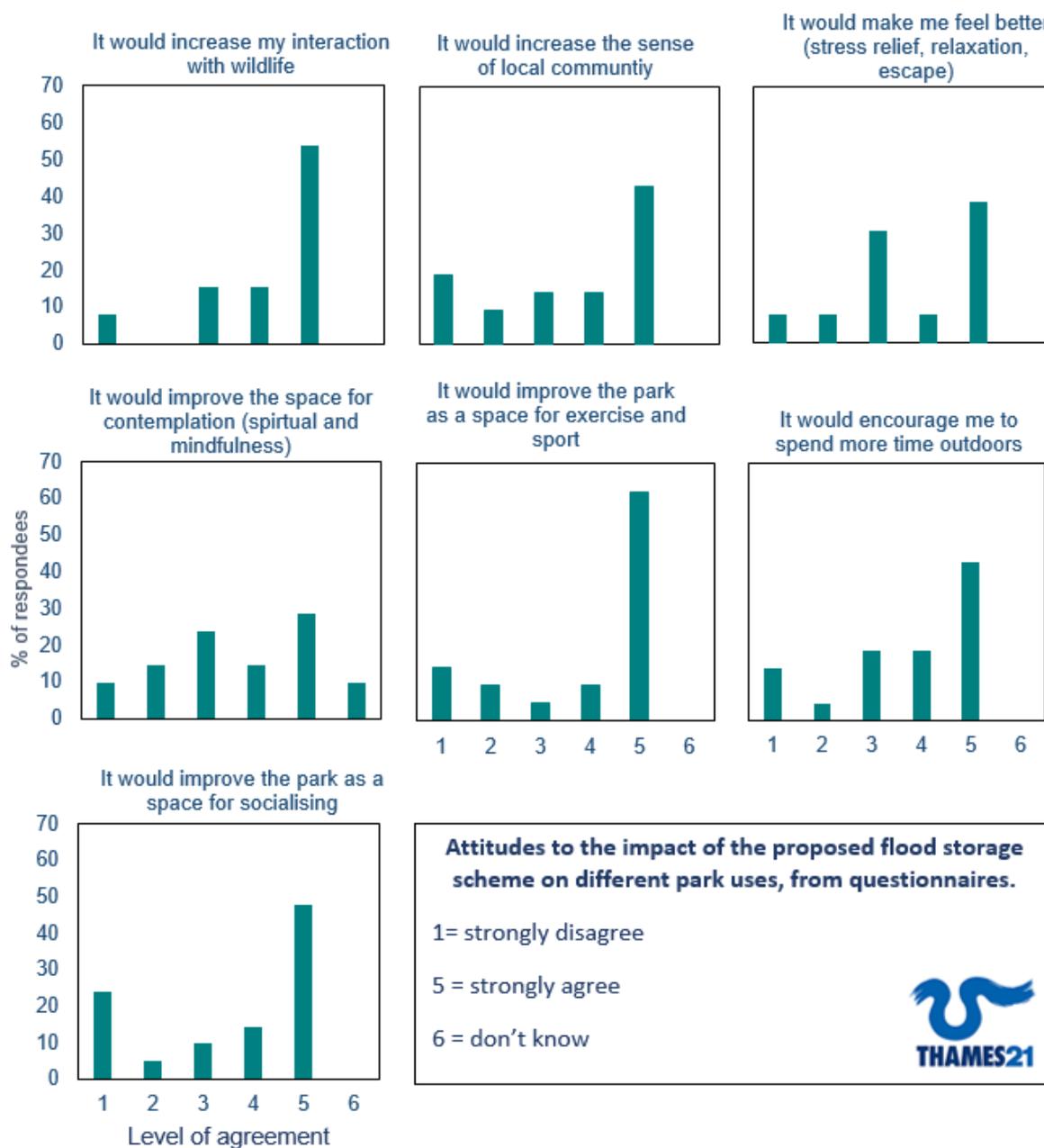
In particular 61.9% of respondents “strongly agree” that the scheme would improve the park as a space for exercise and sport and 47.6% “strongly agree” it would improve the space for socialising (see Figure 10). 42.9% felt it would increase the sense of community and encourage them to spend more time outdoors.

Views were more spread as to whether the wildflower meadow would improve the space as a place for contemplation or make them feel better (e.g. stress relief). This may be because the sports that already take place on these grounds provide considerable outlet for stress relief and perhaps do not create an atmosphere for quiet contemplation.

Views were also mixed as to whether the wildflower meadow would increase their interaction with wildlife, possibly linked to the perception of Rolls Sports Ground as a sporting location rather than an area for wildlife watching.

Questionnaires from Rolls Sports Ground indicated a broader spread of degrees of agreement from “strongly disagree” to “agree” than the other two project areas.

Figure 10:
Rolls sports Ground - Questionnaire Responses - Attitudes to the wider benefits of the on different types of recreational uses



5.2 Rolls sports Ground - Constraints and opportunities identified from public feedback

In total 66.7% of those who completed a questionnaire identified opportunities and constraints concerning the scheme or suggested additional features in the “any other comments” box. This section presents feedback from questionnaires, discussions with the local councillors and the sports clubs West Essex Cricket & Tennis Club and West Essex Football Club.

The limited space available at Rolls Sports Ground means that the design of this scheme is challenging in terms of rearrangement of the cricket and football pitches to ensure no overall loss of playable area. It also requires relocation of the cricket nets without compromising their use due to angle of the sun. These constraints mean the design process was protracted and the range of design considerations the public feedback can influence are more limited compared to the previous two schemes. For example, feedback from public engagement at Larkswood Playing Field resulted in the bund and wildflower meadow being moved back from the park perimeter to address concerns about creating enclosed spaces with limited lines of sight that may make park users feel unsafe. This type of design adjustment would not be possible in Rolls Sports Ground due to limited space, but other aspects, such as planting strategies and access options could be influenced.

Overall, the West Essex Cricket & Tennis Club and West Essex Football Club were in support of the scheme due to the significant impact it is expected to have on improving drainage with no loss of playing area. At present, waterlogging means that pitches are unplayable for several months of the year and prone to damage by informal footpaths created by dog walkers in wet conditions. The scheme is expected to enhance the site by making pitches playable for more of the year. Four members of the public also welcomed improved playability of pitches in their feedback.

The scheme will also improve the pedestrian entrances into the grounds in the vicinity of the scheme, which are currently very narrow and in need of enhancement. This was requested from one questionnaire whilst another also asked for pathways between entrances to prevent informal footpaths used by people taking short cuts from impacting pitches.

Five respondents requested more trees and more floral biodiversity in general to be incorporated into the meadow design and border edges. A further two respondents requested facilities to assist enjoyment of enjoy the wildflower meadow, such as seating. A third respondent requested community participation for the planting of the meadow.

Concerns raised included the issue of ensuring maintenance of the meadow in the long term, including regular removal of litter and removal of any silt build up from storm events. Another concern was that the proposed public stairs over the bund may be dangerous when sports are in progress and on dark evenings - this comment proposed alternative access be offered via Coningsby Gardens and Lena Kennedy Close instead.

One questionnaire asked if the scheme could in some way limit negative behaviours known to occur on the site, such as drug taking and bike riding on the pitches. Several questionnaires requested that dog walking be allowed to continue on the site.

6. Concluding Remarks

Overall, there is strong public support for the schemes in Memorial Park, Larkwood Playing Field and Rolls Sports Ground. Many respondents consented to being contacted again to repeat the questionnaire after the flood storage scheme has been implemented and allowed to establish (71.4% Memorial Park, 76.9% Larkwood Playing Field, 66.7% Rolls Sports Ground). This is part of research by a PhD student at Imperial University focused on public perceptions of green infrastructure and nature-based solutions, in particular health and well being aspects.