

Almondvale Park Consultation

February / March 2012



Background

The West Lothian Local Plan 2009 recognised the importance of the River Almond valley in Livingston's town centre and required the council to carry out an independent study, to find out how the section between the Civic Centre and the Almond Valley Bridge (Almondvale Park) could be improved or revitalised.

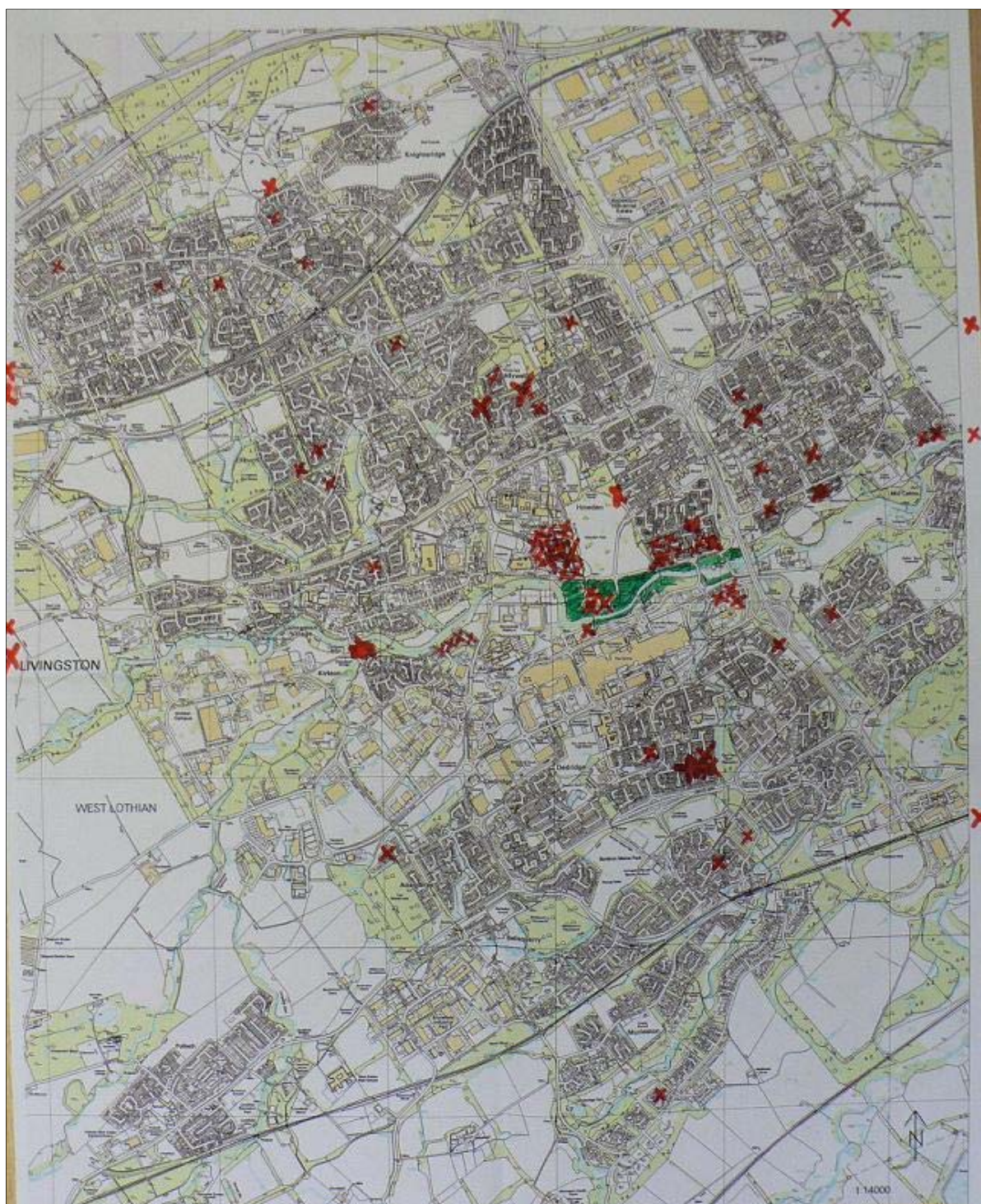
The consultants, Atkins, published a thorough, independent study of Almondvale Park at the end of 2011, including a review of the existing park surroundings, opportunities for improvements, a master plan and possible sources of funding.

Using the findings from this study and its recommendations as the basis for a consultation, various methods were used to find out opinions on these recommendations from members of the public. The consultation was a partnership initiative, involving council colleagues from Planning and Nets and Land Services.

Consultation methods

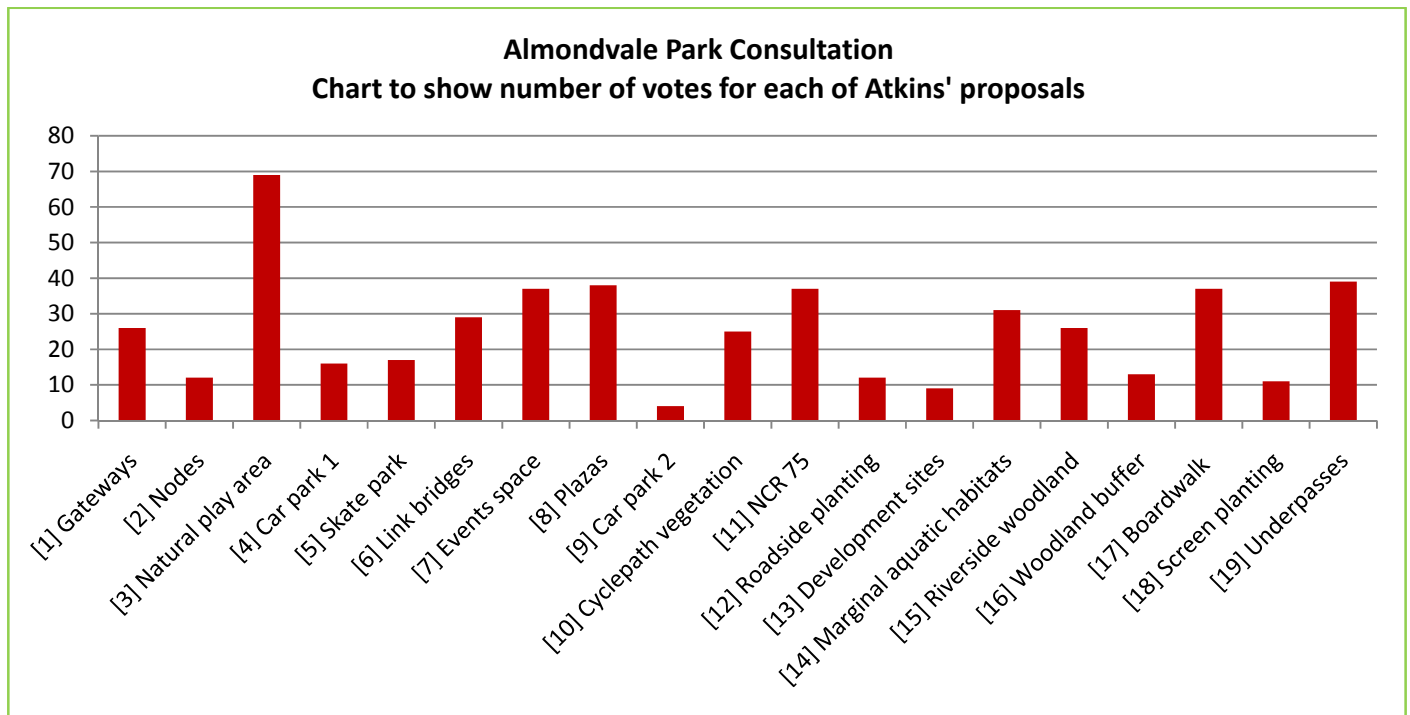
We used various methods to reach a wide audience, throughout February / March 2012:

- 1) A dedicated council web page and online questionnaire
- 2) Displays / feedback sessions at Howden Park Centre, the Civic Centre and The Centre, Livingston
- 3) Paper questionnaires for postal feedback



Map showing the distribution of participants throughout Livingston and surrounds (the central, dark green area is Almondvale Park)

Results of the park consultation



Top priorities

As can be seen in the graph above, by far the top priority for spending is to convert the existing amphitheatre into a **natural play area** for the park. Other popular suggestions include **lighting and decorating the underpasses** to make them feel safer and more welcoming, **creating plazas** for socializing (ideally with outlets to buy snacks), **creating a boardwalk and interpretation boards** for informal learning about local wildlife, **moving the cycle path** away from the road to encourage cycling, providing an **events space** for community events, and planting **new plants along the riverbank** to increase wildlife value.

A major consideration for any improvements is the continual, regular maintenance of the area to keep it looking good, to address/deter vandalism, and to keep it open for a feeling of safety. Car parking is a big concern, as the car parks in the area are already overflowing. The local wildlife is also an important issue for many people, with suggestions for increasing biodiversity and wildlife interpretation.

Additional suggestions put forward include: re-instating the putting green and the canoeing jetties on the river, and installing relatively low-cost features such as a permanent orienteering course. A couple of people suggested using the River Almond to generate electricity, however, the council does have a Renewables Strategy, which can be found at: <http://www.westlothian.gov.uk/media/downloadoc/1799514/1842967/renewables>

As the majority of the proposals for the park are almost directly south of Howden Park, there were also suggestions to link Almondvale Park with Howden Park, to create a large Town Park in Livingston's centre.

Recommendations

The results of the consultation indicate that there is broad support to undertake improvements to the park, as long as these improvements are backed by a comprehensive maintenance program to ensure the park's upkeep and to minimize vandalism.

The top priorities for improvements are broadly related to the themes of play, safety, meeting spaces, increasing biodiversity and creating learning opportunities in the park.