

# Barbican public realm improvements Opinion Surveys



A report by Living Streets on behalf of The City of London Authority



**Living Streets** is the national charity that stands up for pedestrians. With our supporters we work to create safe, attractive and enjoyable streets, where people want to walk.



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## Background and Aims

Living Streets is the national charity that stands up for pedestrians. With our supporters we work to create safe, attractive and enjoyable streets, where people want to walk. Living Streets has a Service Level Agreement with the City of London to support their walking and public realm service delivery. As part of this agreement, Living Streets were asked to undertake on site opinion surveys at two locations on The Barbican Estate.

The purpose of the opinion surveys was to understand how pedestrians feel about the newly improved public spaces at Ben Johnson Walk and St Giles Terrace. Both areas have undergone an improvement project including new seating and planting for the public. The City of London carried out a separate consultation specifically for residents of The Barbican Estate which took the form of a survey sent to households. The purpose of the on-site surveys was therefore to compliment this process by finding out the opinions of people who work in the area or visit for recreation or tourism.

## Methodology

St Giles Terrace and Ben Johnson Walk were the locations selected by the City of London as they are areas where improvements to the public realm have taken place.

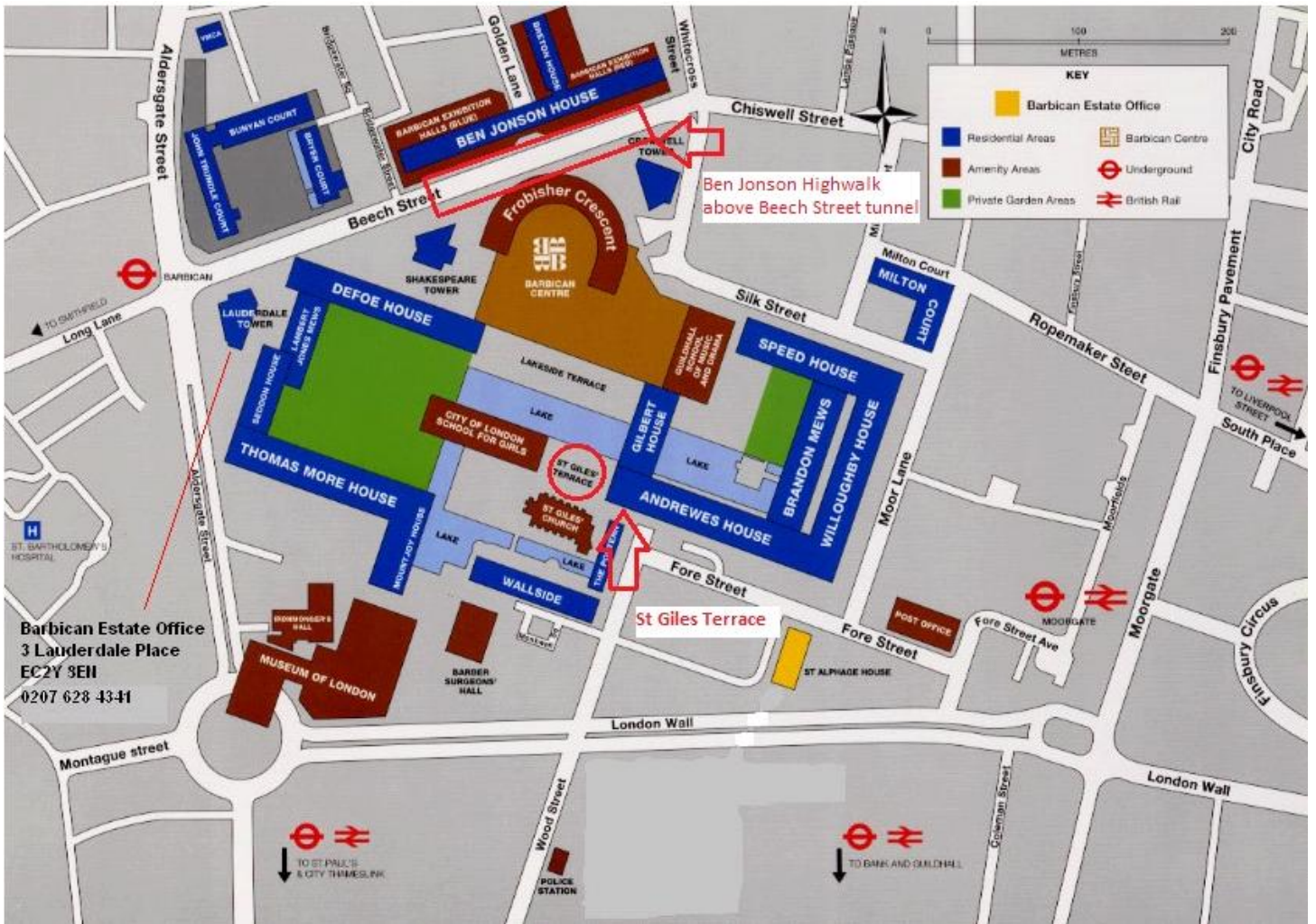
The questionnaire was designed by the City of London to be quick to carry out, whilst collecting a range of meaningful data on the locations following the improvement schemes. The survey also echoed the questionnaire sent round to Barbican residents in order that the information collected was comparable. The questions for the on-site surveys were altered from the questionnaire in order to make sure the survey was suitable to face-to-face questioning.

It was decided that open questions would provide the most enlightening information and would allow pedestrians to provide full and honest answers, without being steered by the questions. The surveys used can be found in Appendices One and Two.

The timings of the surveys were arranged to catch people who visit the area so that we complemented the separate surveys sent out to Barbican residents. As such, we carried out the surveys on week day lunch times when people might be using the seating at St Giles Terrace and Ben Johnson Walk for a work break. We visited The Barbican on days when the weather was hot and sunny which meant the two seating areas generally had a relatively high number of people there who we could potentially survey.

In total we collected 204 surveys – 107 at St Giles Terrace and 97 at Ben Johnson Walk. These were collected over the course of three lunchtimes between 9 and 26 July 2013.

## Locations of Surveys



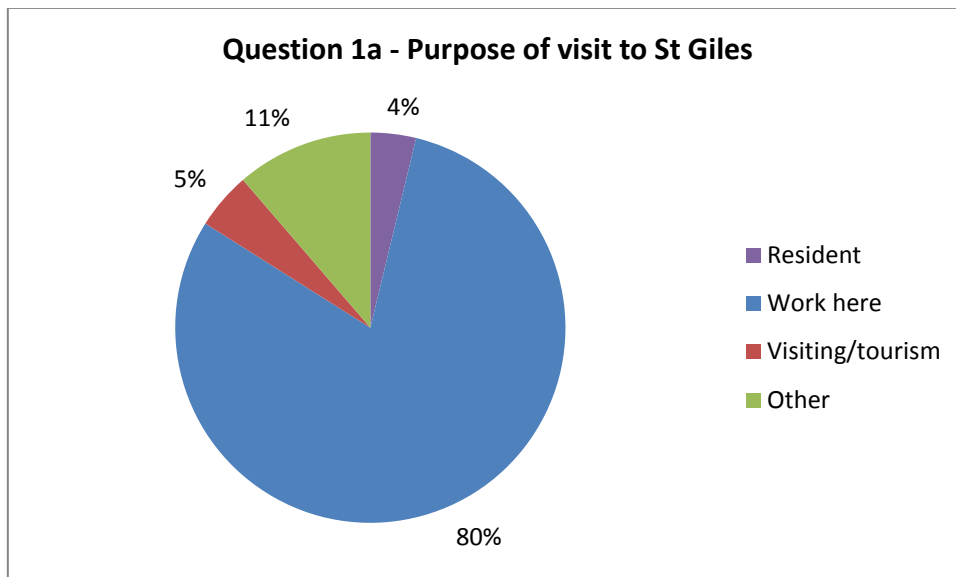
# Summary of Findings

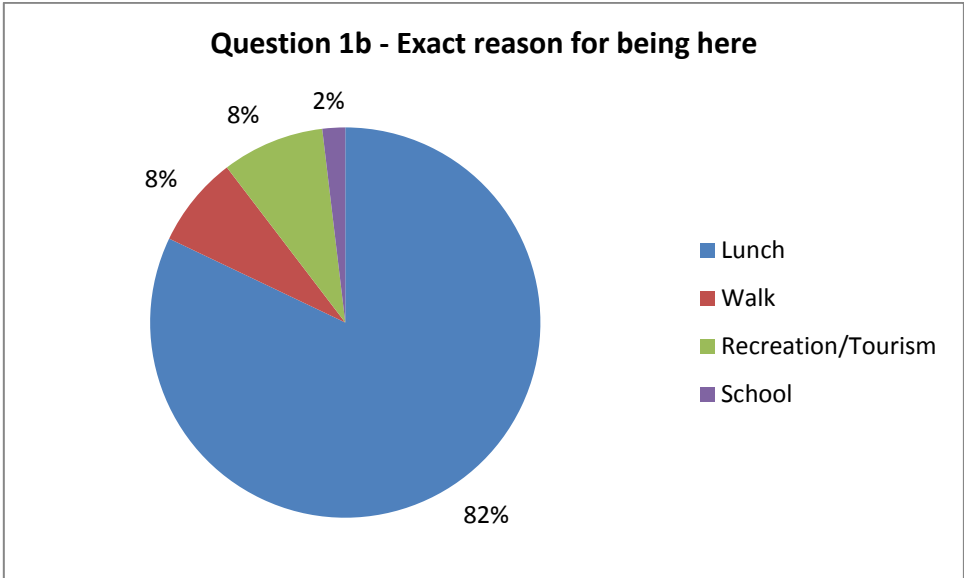
## St Giles Terrace

Surveys were conducted at St Giles Terrace on 9 and 25 July between the hours of 12pm and 2.30pm. Head counts of people using the seating were taken to establish the usage patterns of the area:

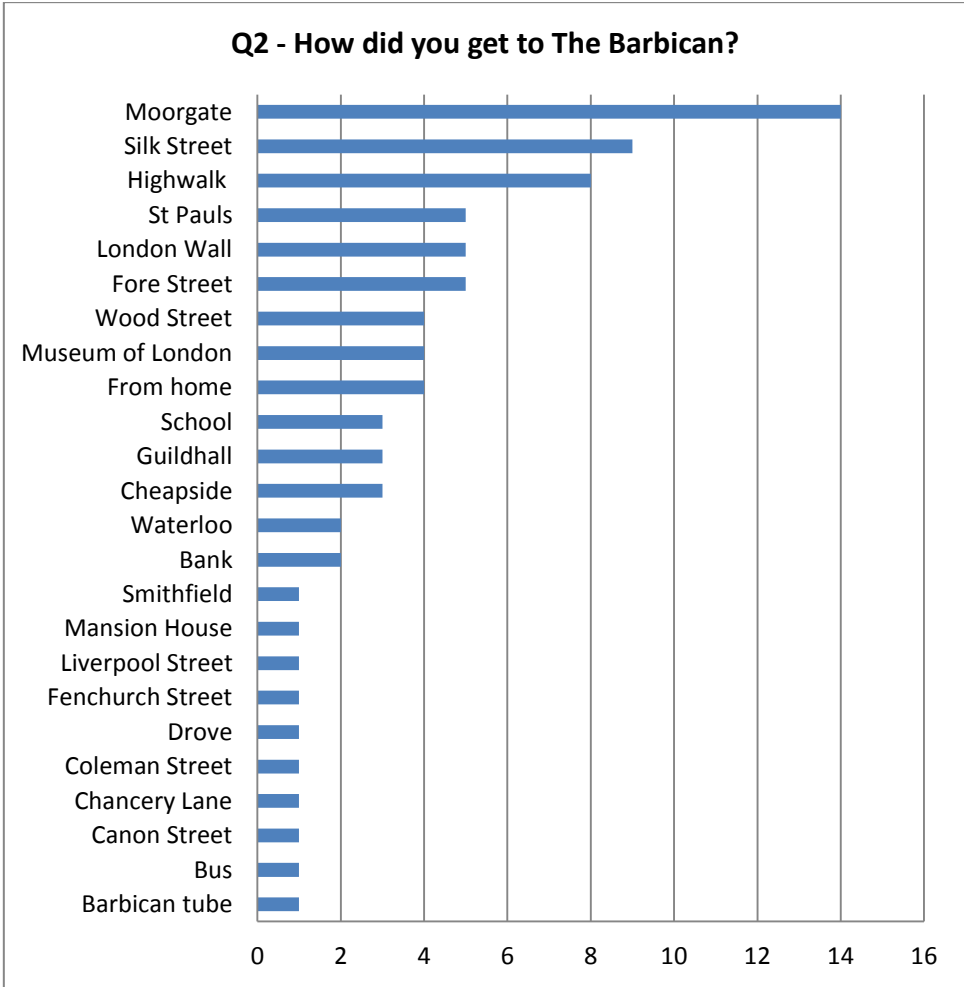
Time	9 July	25 July
12pm	27	1
1pm	36	18
2pm	37	20

In total, 107 surveys were obtained at this location. The results of each question are illustrated by the graphs below.

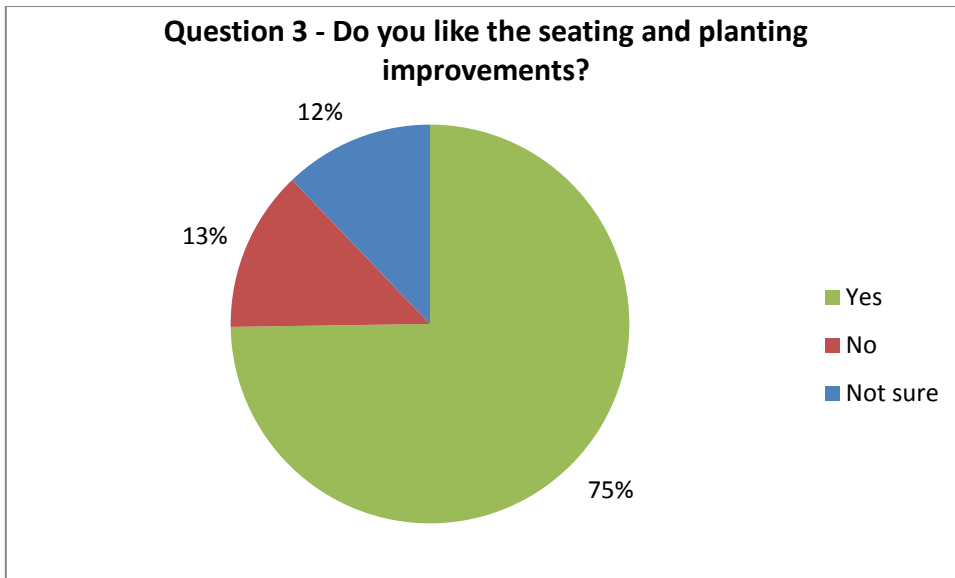




The majority of people visiting St Giles Terrace on the days we surveyed were people who work in the surrounding area and had come to eat their lunch or enjoy a break at the seating area. A few people mentioned 'chilling out' suggesting that the space is an area for relaxation. There were also some comments about 'getting out in the sun' as the weather was particularly favourable on the days we carried out the surveys.

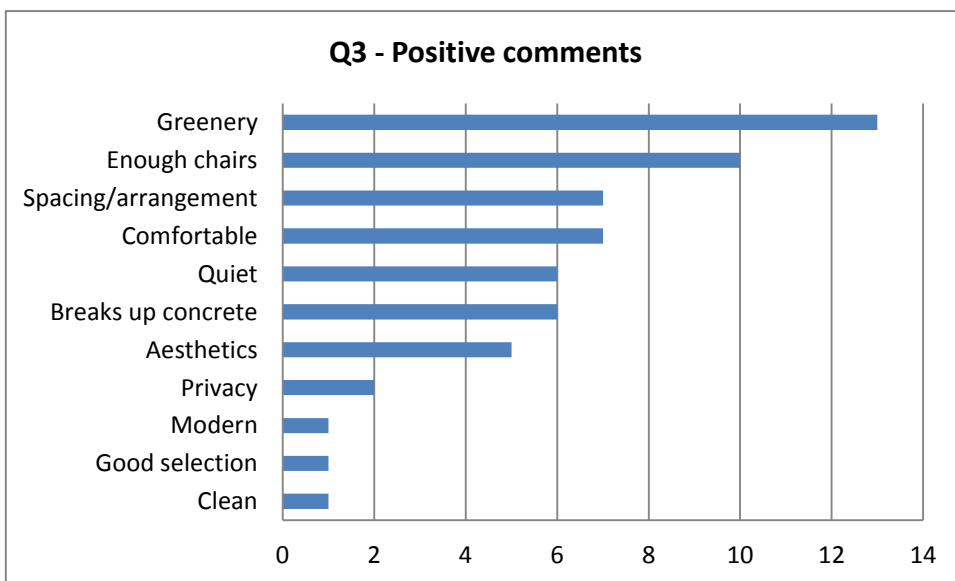


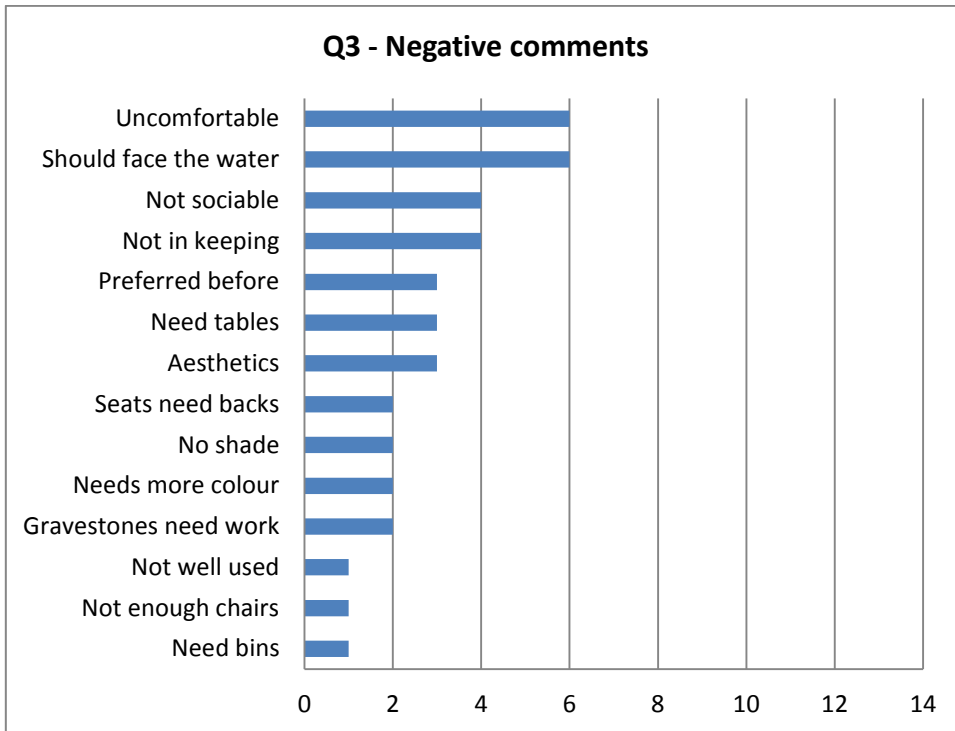
Only one person surveyed approached The Barbican by car, meaning that 106 people arrived by a mixture of public transport and walking. Moorgate, Silk Street and the High Walk from the Barbican Centre were all popular routes to St Giles Terrace. People who come to sit at St Giles Terrace generally tend to come from the East or South of the Barbican estate, with fewer approaching from the South West and very few from the North West.



Exactly three quarters of those we asked liked the improvements that have been made with the remaining quarter being pretty much evenly divided between disliking the improvements and being unsure.

We then asked people to elaborate on why they liked or disliked the improvements. These comments were then categorised in order to simplify the answers received.



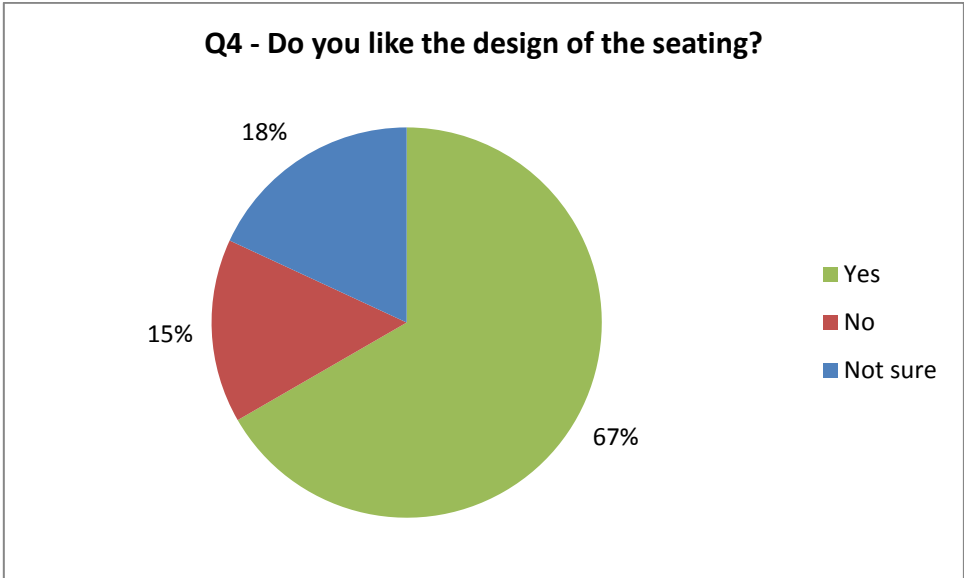


The positive comments relate to the increased greenery and planting in the area as well as the number of seats. People surveyed seemed to think more chairs had been put in or at least that the number of chairs now in place is sufficient. Some people like the arrangement of the seating as it gives privacy and allows people to sit on their own. Those who are happy with the arrangement of the seating feel it gives space and one person commented “Looked before a bit unwelcoming - it has softened it and makes it feel a nicer place/more welcoming”. However, around 10% of those surveyed do not like the seating arrangement and either feel it is antisocial or that the seats should face the water. For example, one respondent said “Curve faces in the wrong direction - faces flats. You can't sit in a group - end up sitting back to back and facing a stranger opposite you”.

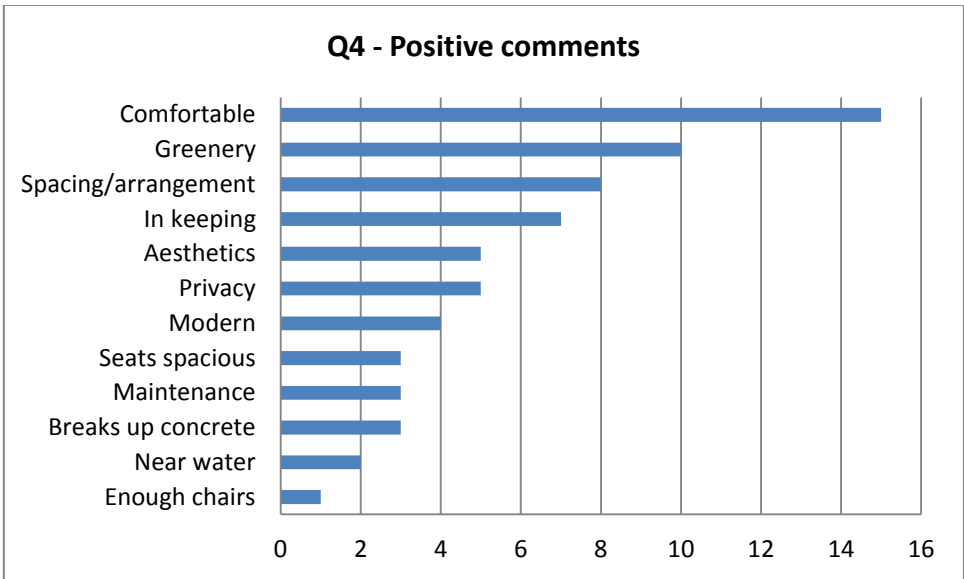
Many people were generally positive, saying the seating area was ‘very nice’, ‘pleasant’ and ‘much improved’. An almost equal number of people feel the seats are comfortable and uncomfortable.

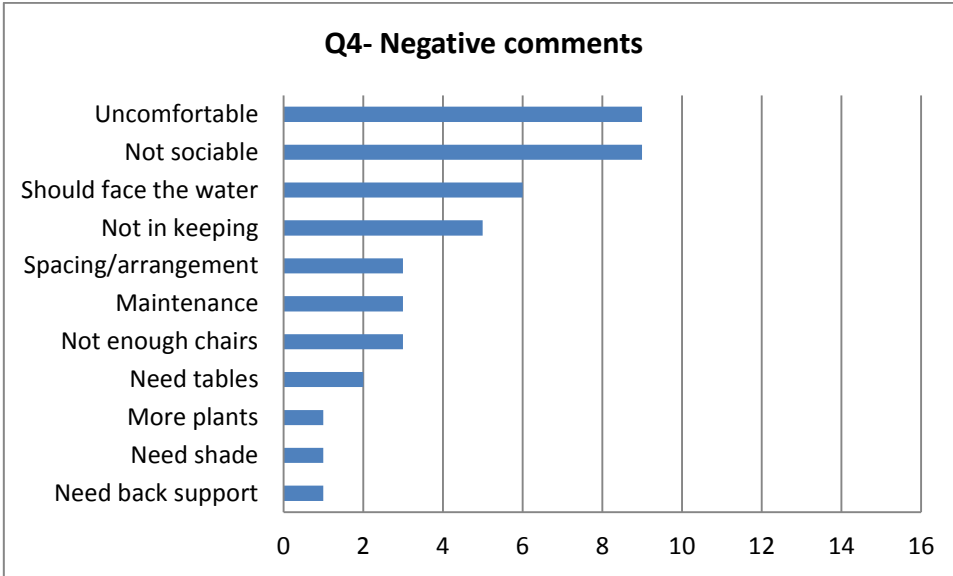
Although relatively small in number (around 4%), the strongest negative reactions were around the design of the chairs not being in keeping with the surroundings of the historic church and the Barbican Centre itself. Those who felt the furniture did not suit its context tended to feel that the previous seating was better, commenting for example: “Inappropriate for the setting of St Giles and out of keeping with history of church. The original benches were perfect”.





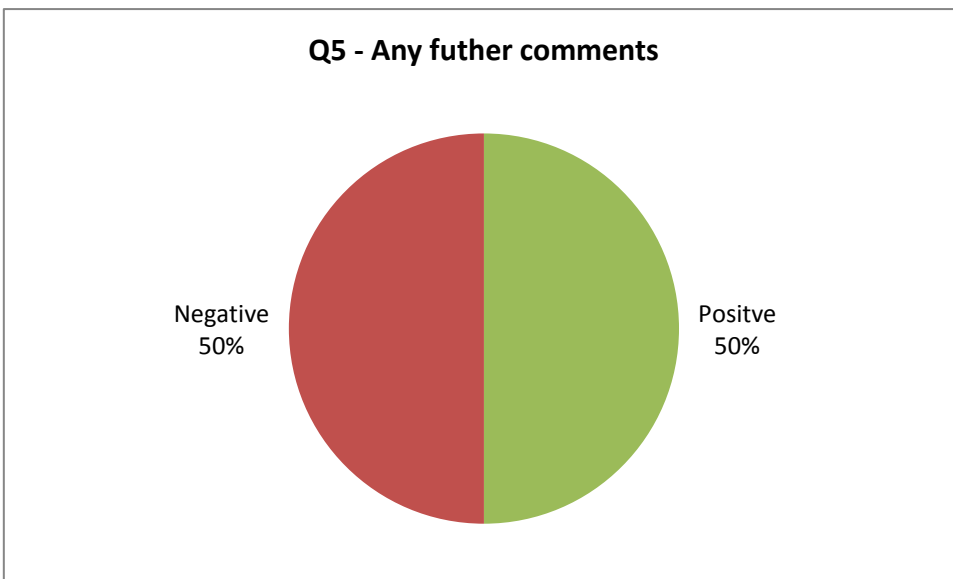
Question Four asked people to comment specifically on the design of the seating and planters. Many people already mentioned this in question three as it is obviously difficult to give an opinion on the seating without touching on the design. The majority of people like the design of the seating, but it's a slightly lower number than those who like the seating area improvements overall.





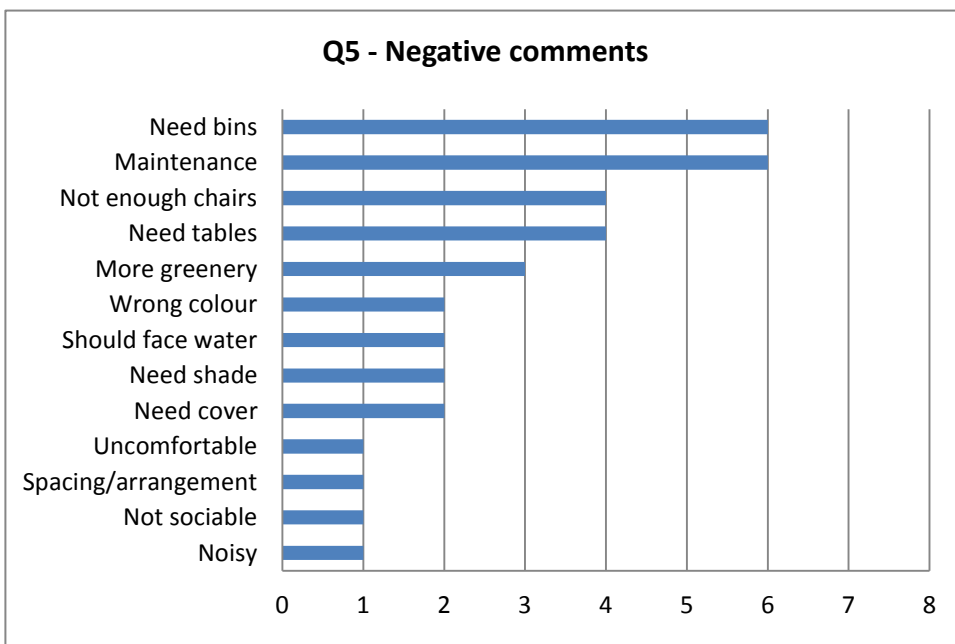
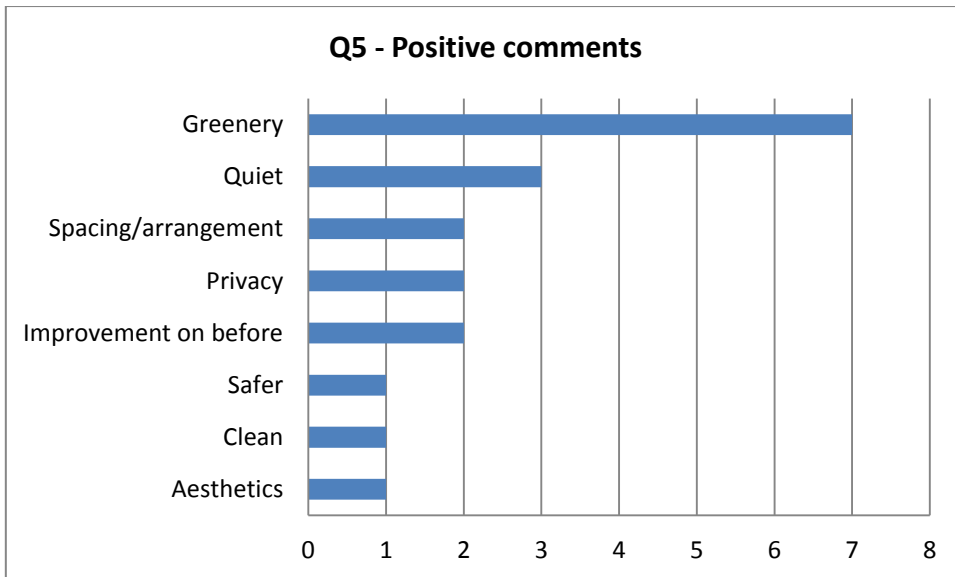
The comments recorded for this question were very similar to the previous one. 14% of people specifically said that the chairs are comfortable, and again the planting and greenery was appreciated. One negative comment received for this and the previous question was the lack of space to put your lunch or belongings, with some commenting that the end up using the planters to rest their belongings!

Again, the issue of the arrangement and direction of the seating was raised “Seats too remote for people to speak to. Why not facing the lake or church?” There does seem to be a division on this issue with some people feeling the arrangement provides privacy and personal space, some feeling it is awkward as it forces them to face strangers and others feeling it is antisocial. The same seating arrangement has clearly been interpreted very differently by different users.



Of those who wished to make a further comment, half were deemed positive and half negative. Many comments were just general – for example ‘it’s a real improvement’ or ‘it’s a nice little park’ for positive and ‘don’t feel they have worked’ for negative.

Comments that were more specific have been categorised in order that they are easier to analyse:



As the graphs show, the majority of positive comments related to the greenery. The negative comments related to the need for rubbish bins in the area as well as some concerns about maintenance. Some felt that if money was available, it should have been spent on essential maintenance in the area. Others felt 'it could do with a lick of paint' or that the brickwork and gravestones needed repair or cleaning.

### General Findings

There is a generally positive feeling towards the seating area at St Giles Terrace but some division of opinion regarding their arrangement, spacing and orientation. There are some practical suggestions for improvement which may enhance the area and perhaps encourage more people to use St Giles Terrace.

### Recommendations for improvement:

- Add rubbish bins
- Consider rearranging some of the seating to face the water
- Add some tables so that people have a space to put their belongings
- Spend some money on repairing and cleaning of the surrounding environment
- As the planting is so popular this should be replicated in future schemes

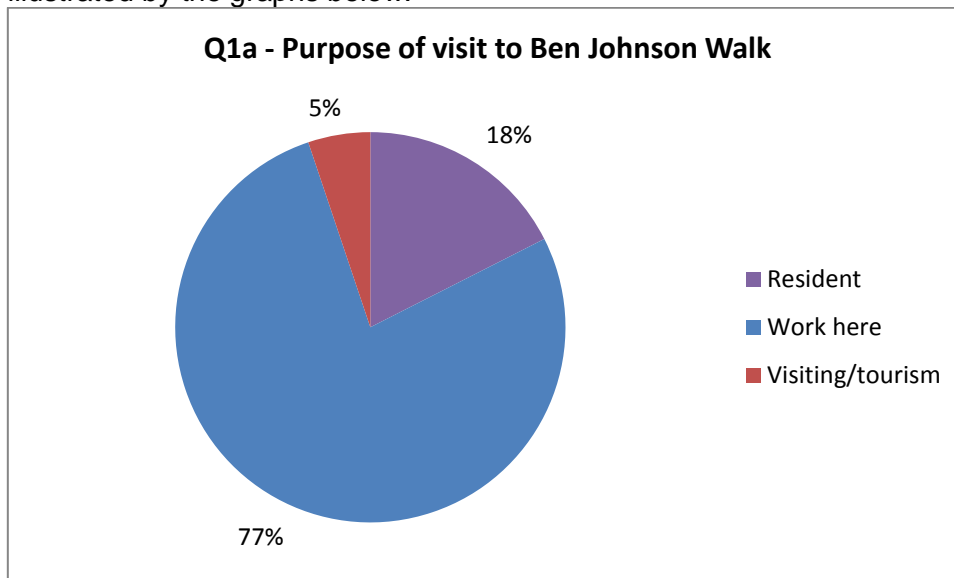
## Ben Johnson Walk

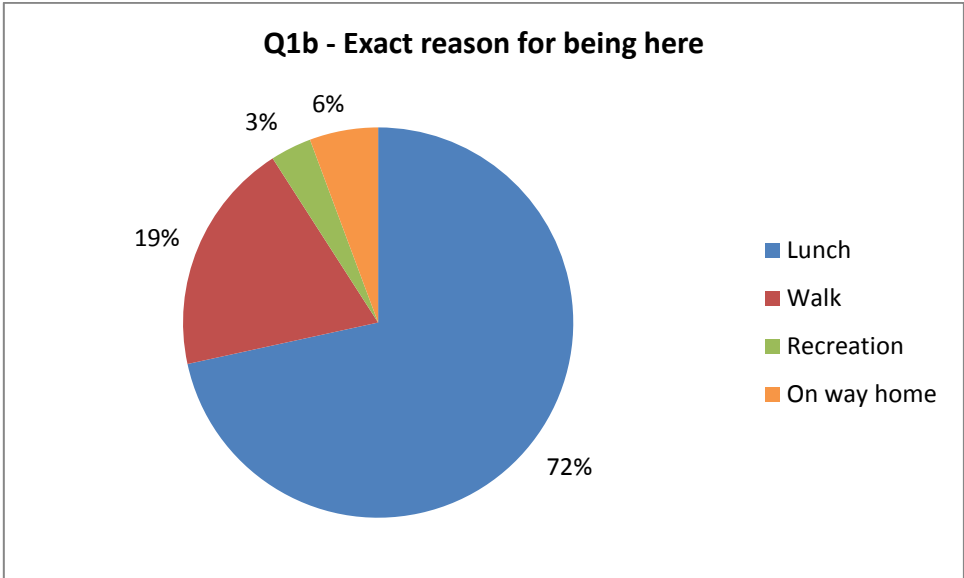
Surveys were conducted at Ben Johnson Walk on 9, 25 and 26 July between the hours of 12pm and 2.30pm.

Time	9th July	25th July	26th July
12pm	0	0	4
1pm	6	11	12
2pm	17	12	11

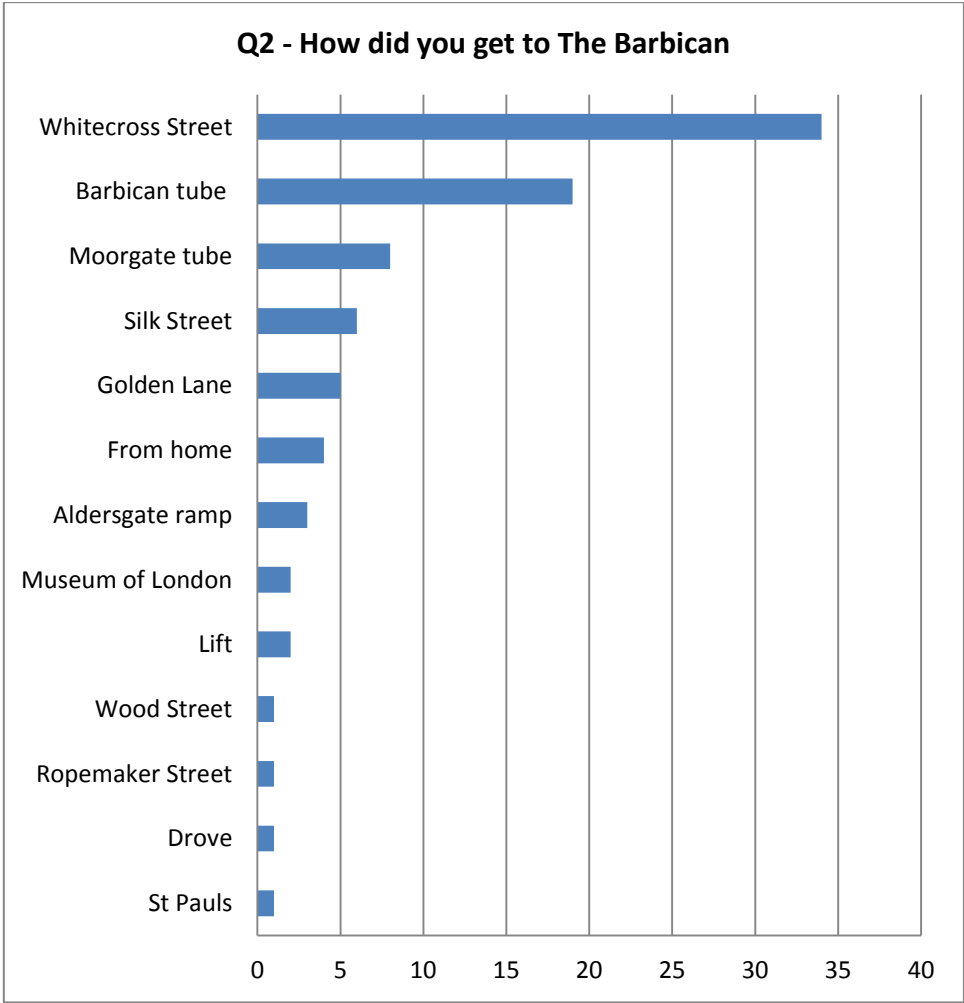
The people counts suggest that fewer people use Ben Johnson Walk compared to St Giles Terrace and that it tends to get busier later on in the lunchtime period.

In total, 97 surveys were obtained at this location. The results of each question are illustrated by the graphs below.

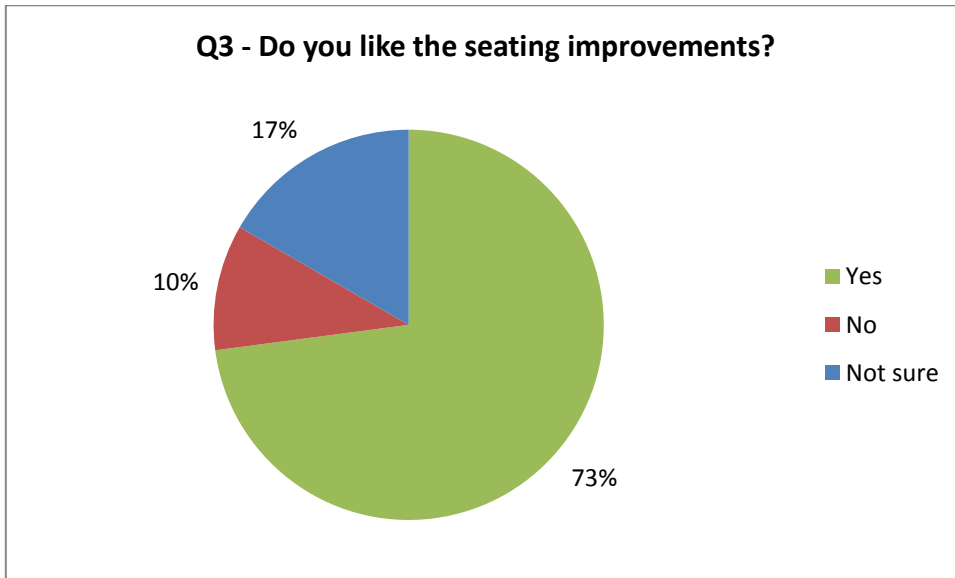




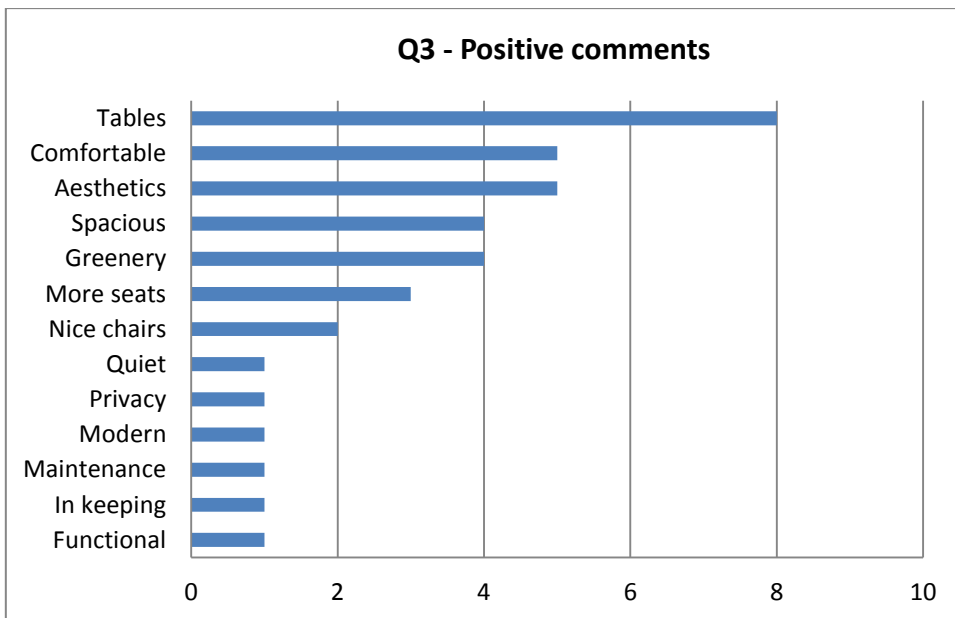
As in St Giles Terrace, the majority of people questioned were people who work in the local area who have come to have their lunch. A slightly higher percentage of people at Ben Johnson were residents, suggesting that this is less public area. 19% of people surveyed were on Ben Johnson Walk to go for a walk either in their lunch break or just as part of their routine.

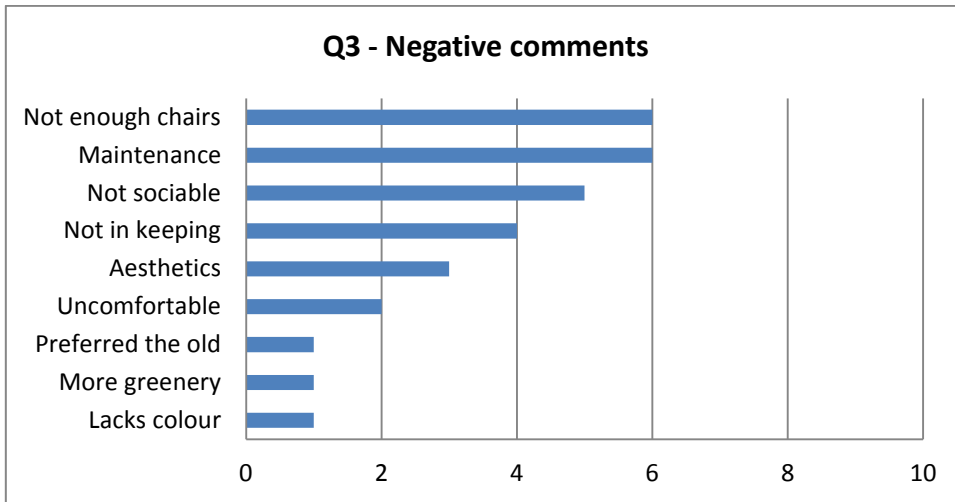


Only one person surveyed had driven to The Barbican and everyone else had reached the estate by a mixture of public transport and walking. 35% of people approached Ben Johnson Walk from Whitecross Street, using the pedestrian ramp or stairs. A further 20% of people came from Barbican tube station and up along the High Walk.



The majority of people questioned do like the seating improvements made but no planting improvements could be identified.





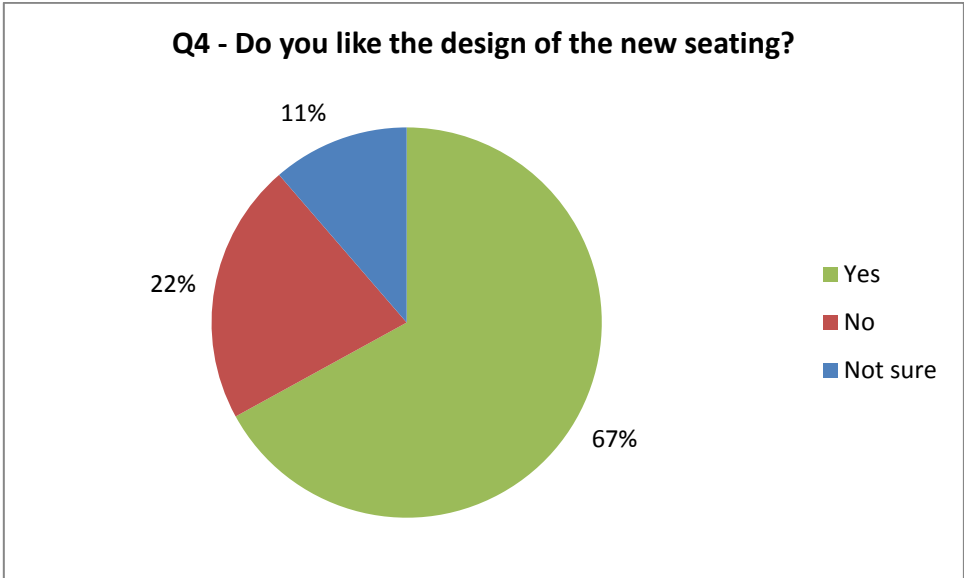
Evidently, those who feel positive about the seating at Ben Johnson Walk are in favour of the tables between the chairs and generally feel positive about the look of the seating. The tables are seen as a very useful addition to people who are coming to eat their lunch. However, in the negative comments, a few people commented that these tables are at the expense of seats and therefore numbers are restricted. Some felt that the spacious seats and the tables were a positive and that they provide personal space and privacy. In contrast, others feel they take up too much space, aren't sociable and that there aren't enough seats.

5% of everyone surveyed commented specifically on the comfort of the chairs with comments such as "I like the chairs - nicer than the old benches. Now have a table" and "it always used to be a bit of a problem getting a decent seat up here".

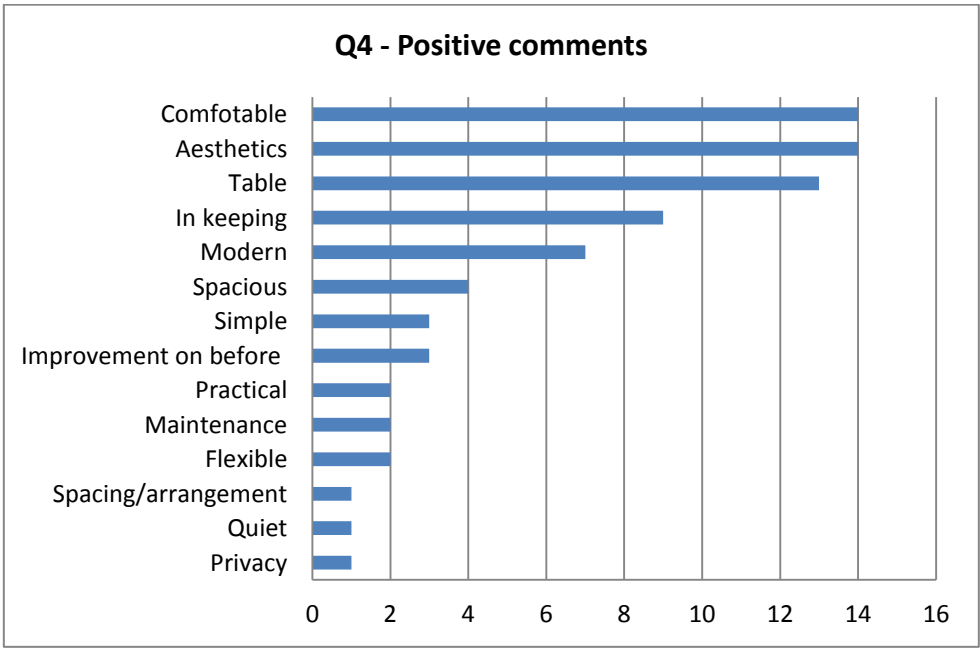
Although in the minority, the negative comments were sometimes extreme. There is a perception that fewer seats have been put in place following the scheme. 6% of people had negative comments about the maintenance of the benches and feel they already look 'weathered' or 'bleached'. As with St Giles Terrace, those who feel the seating is not in keeping with the surroundings weren't many in number but were had some very strong feelings as the following quotes demonstrate:

"It's the nadir. Impoverished thinking. Don't meet high design standards of surroundings"

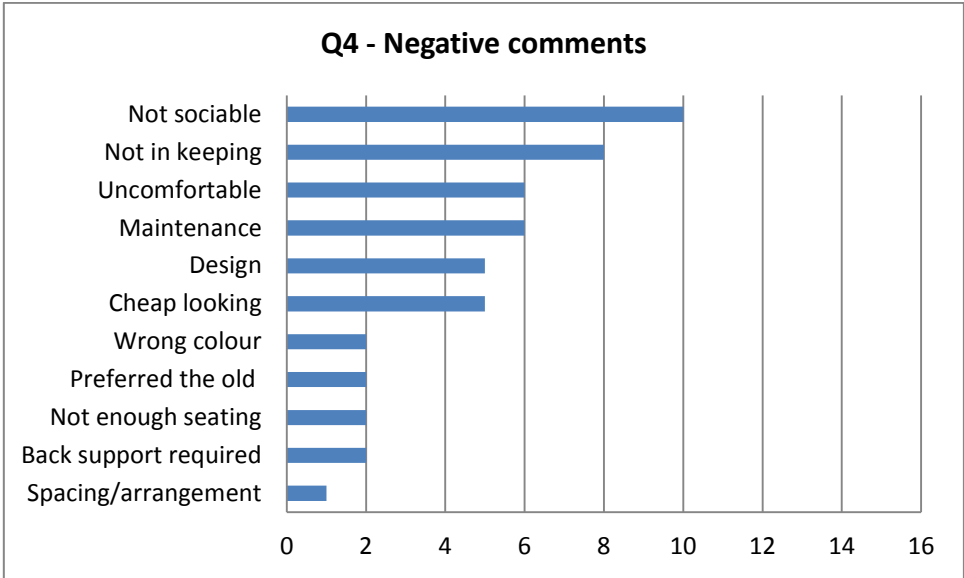
"Seat looks terrible. I assumed they were temporary"



When asked specifically about the design, the same percentage of people felt they liked the seating although a slightly higher percentage actively disliked it.





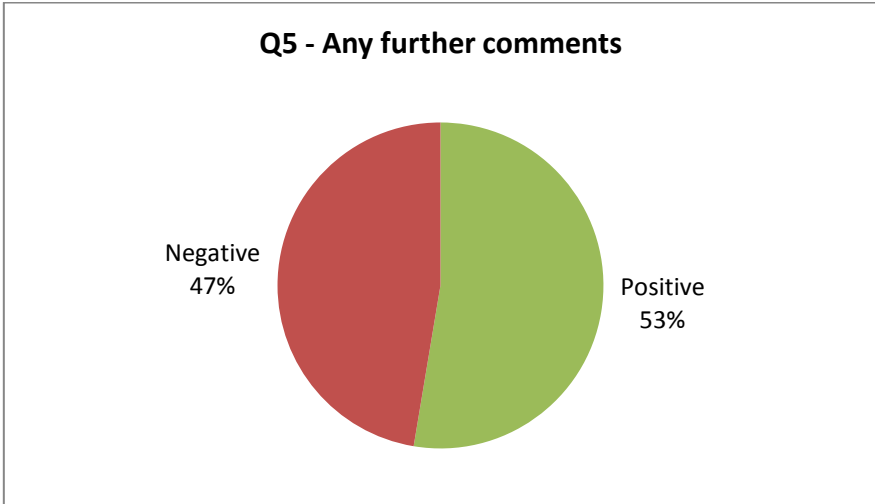


The most common reasons for liking the design of the chairs were comfort, aesthetics and the addition of tables.

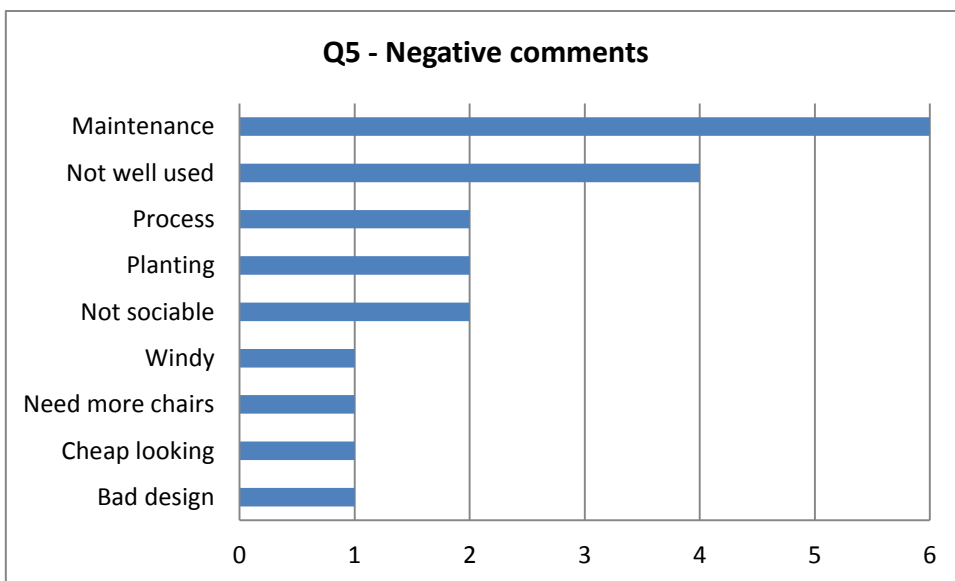
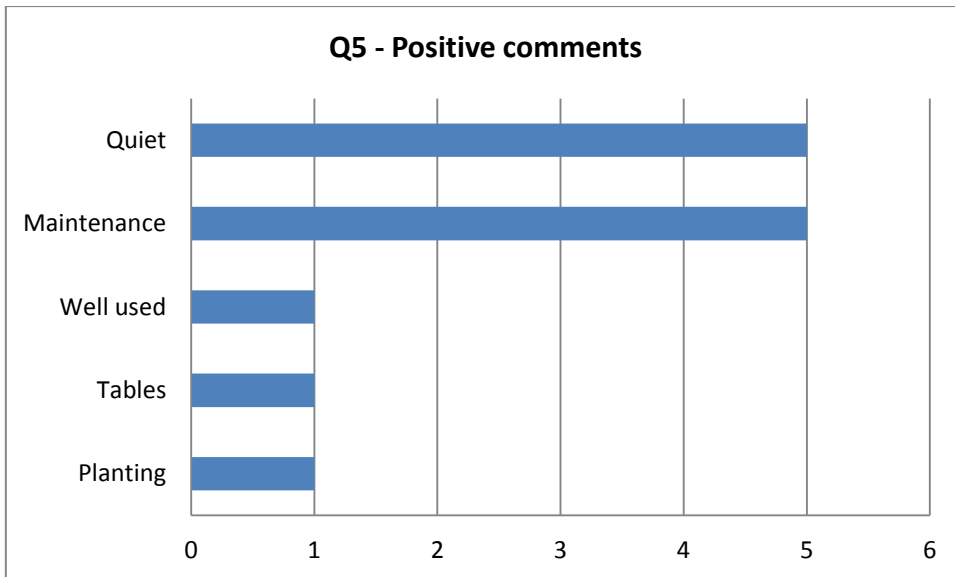
People felt that the chairs were comfortable as they are wide, allowing enough room to relax in. One participant commented “Wide and comfortable... Sometimes the chairs can be too small - these are ample in space”. Those who felt the chairs were uncomfortable were particularly concerned about how deep they are and unsuitable for shorter people.

Those who made positive comments about the aesthetics of the seating area described them as ‘different’, ‘quirky’, and ‘quite stylish’. Around half as many felt the seats weren’t in keeping with the Barbican Estate and commented specifically on the wood being too light.

Around 10% of those surveyed felt that the seating was not sociable. Most people could appreciate that the seating was good for individuals coming to eat their lunch alone but that “You can't sit 2 by 2. Just for City people having lunch - it's a bit sad”. We observed a large number of groups coming to the area and sitting on the tiled plinths as opposed to the new seating in order to be able to chat.



As with St Giles Terrace, those who wished to make further comments were pretty evenly spread between positive and negative.



The appeal for some people seems to be the peace and quiet of Ben Johnson Walk with respondents making comments such as: “It’s like being out of The City - very tranquil”. There were also a number of comments reflecting positively on the standards of cleanliness and maintenance in the area. However, there were a comparable number of negative comments on this topic. These comments related both to the seating itself “one bench has already broken” and the surrounding area “Dire need of improvements all over the shop. Tiles loose, construction has been taking place on the gardens all year. Ugly - needs improvement as soon as possible.”

Although a view not shared by any others, this comment from one respondent was of particular interest: “Wasn’t sure if it is intended for casual users or people going to the Barbican - unsure if it is public or private space”. This person felt that it wasn’t clear if the seating area was intended for use by non-Barbican residents. This ties in with a comment received at St Giles Terrace that the seating area could be better signposted.

It is important that the public are made aware of these areas as such quiet, pedestrian friendly public spaces are in short supply in The City.

It should be noted that there were a small number of comments voiced by residents who felt that the process of approving the benches had not been carried out effectively.

## General Findings

Similarly to St Giles Terrace, there is a generally positive perception of the seating improvements at Ben Johnson Walk but some disparity of opinion on the configuration of the chairs. What some see as a positive (i.e. the provision of tables for lunch and a sense of personal space), others see as a drawback (i.e. the tables do not create sociable spaces).

### Recommendations for improvement:

- Consider reconfiguring the arrangement of benches to provide some areas for groups to sit together
- Prioritise improvements to the surrounding area including fixing missing tiles on plinths
- Improve signage to the seating area and/or take measures to ensure the public know they are entitled to use the area

## General findings

Despite some strong opinions and forceful comments, it should also be noted that there were a large number of people surveyed who had very neutral feelings towards the seating and planting improvements. Respondents made comments such as 'I hadn't noticed they were new' and 'it doesn't affect me, I just walk through'.

Overall, our survey findings reveal that both seating improvement schemes are popular and well liked by the people who use them for a lunch break or for relaxation. Although there are mixed feelings towards the arrangement of the seating at both sites, this does not affect the general positivity towards St Giles Terrace and Ben Johnson Walk.

## Evaluation

A number of issues relating to the methodology and the way in which the surveys were carried out have been identified and should be considered when analysing the results.

- Respondents were self selecting to a certain extent. We didn't carry out any sampling and as such, the people we surveyed were people who had the time to spare and were interested in what we were talking about. In some instances, this may skew the results
- The responses to the question regarding how people got to the Barbican varied from tube stations to roads and specific entrances to the estate and was interpreted slightly differently by those carrying out and responding to the survey. As such, the results to this question are not as comparable as they could be if the question were more structured

# Appendices

## Appendix One: St Giles Terrace Survey



Living Streets is the national charity that stands up for pedestrians. With our supporters we work to create safe, attractive and enjoyable streets, where people want to walk.

Initials

### ST GILES TERRACE - BARBICAN PEDESTRIAN ATTITUDE SURVEYS JULY 2013

Would you be willing to take part in a study by the City of London into the improvements that have been made in this area? There are five questions and it will only take two minutes to complete

We are from Living Streets, the national charity that stands up for pedestrians. With our supporters we work to create safe, attractive and enjoyable streets, where people want to walk. We are conducting the survey for the City of London Corporation, the local authority for the Square Mile of the City of London.

1. Purpose of visit

- a) Resident  Work here  Visiting/tourism  Other   
b) What is the purpose of being in St Giles terrace now?

2. Which way did you come to the Barbican?

3. Do you like the seating and planting improvements to St Giles Terrace? Yes/No/Not sure (please circle)

Please elaborate (Why? Why not? Do they make a big difference to the environment?)

4. Do you like the design of the new furniture? Yes/No/Not sure

Please elaborate (does the design fit in with the area? What would you change?)

5. Are there any other comments you would like to make?



## Appendix Two: Ben Johnson Walk Survey



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Initials

### BEN JOHNSON WALK - BARBICAN PEDESTRIAN ATTITUDE SURVEYS JULY 2013

Would you be willing to take part in a study by the City of London into the improvements that have been made in this area? There are five questions and it will only take two minutes to complete

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#### 1. Purpose of visit

- a) Resident [ ]    Work here [ ]    Visiting/tourism [ ]    Other [ ]  
b) What is the purpose of being in Ben Johnson walk now?

#### 2. Which way did you come to the Barbican?

#### 3. Do you like the seating and planting improvements to Ben Johnson Walk? Yes/No/Not sure (please circle)

Please elaborate (*Why? Why not? Do they make a big difference to the environment?*)

#### 4. Do you like the design of the new furniture? Yes/No/Not sure

Please elaborate (*does the design fit in with the area? What would you change?*)

#### 5. Are there any other comments you would like to make?

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