

Golders Hill Park Café Consultation



1. Introduction & Background

The City of London Corporation appointed Groundwork London to carry out a public engagement and consultation process with Golders Hill Park users and the wider community to ensure that the park café continues to meet the needs of local users and residents. The process was commissioned as a consequence of the withdrawal of the leaseholder from their agreement to provide café services. The findings of this process, which took place in July and August 2020, will inform the tender specification to determine who will take over the lease for the café.

This report is based on the findings of an online questionnaire and two focus groups. The link to the online questionnaire was shared widely with key user groups and the wider community and paper copies with pre-paid return envelopes were available on request. A direct email allowed the public to contribute additional comments throughout the process. The questionnaire received 866 responses, with 412 people leaving further comments or suggestions to contribute their expectations and aspirations for the café. Two virtual focus groups were held with a total of 20 residents that had expressed their interest in taking part via the questionnaire, selected with a view to providing insight from a range of age groups and backgrounds

2. Key Findings

2.1 Focus Groups

Simple, healthy, fresh offer

All participants favoured a small menu of simple, homemade, high-quality food and drink over a larger variety of offerings, with healthiness and freshness of food emphasised repeatedly. Food options mentioned most frequently were homemade soups, salads, changing specials, breakfasts, children's meals and vegetarian/vegan options. All present felt the homemade ice cream currently available to be an important part of the café offer.

A park café that caters for all

Those present agreed that it was important for a park café offer to reflect the diversity of the local community, as demonstrated in the following quote: "We have to think of all walks of life. Everybody wants to use the park as it is the most wonderful place to be." There will be a need for affordable dishes and drinks on the menu, while striking a balance between affordability and quality. Participants discussed dietary requirements of the local community, with some expressing a desire for the café to be kosher certified and others expressing that the café couldn't "be all things to all people". Most agreed that the next café management should take care to provide options that satisfy the vast majority of the dietary requirements and preferences present in the community, such as high-quality vegetarian/vegan options and pre-packaged kosher options.

Community-minded management

Participants agreed that the café should be unique and identifiable with the surrounding community. Some stressed that they would not like the café to be taken over by a chain however all agreed that the quality of the food and drink on offer and the ability of management to provide options for the whole community should be the top priority. Some felt that the café should be a destination for something unique and a few suggested ways to achieve this, e.g. a pizza oven, cream teas. All agreed that friendly and familiar staff service was essential in a park café and some expressed a desire for the café to open earlier in the mornings and to stay open into the early evenings.

Inviting atmosphere

An inviting atmosphere was felt to be crucial to the success of the park café. The café layout was seen to play a key role in this. Suggestions were made for how this could be improved, for example installing more comfortable seating, both indoors and outdoors, a mixture of types of indoor seating, an outdoor parasol and changing the counter size and position. All praised the beautiful outdoor setting and vistas surrounding the café. Participants felt that the recent introduction of a separate coffee window has helped to ease crowding and shorten waiting times, felt to be particularly important in the current climate of COVID-19 restrictions.

Access

Physical access was discussed by several participants, who emphasised the importance of all residents being able to access both the café itself and the toilets.

2.2 Online Questionnaire Survey

Q1 showed that 72% of respondents visit Golders Hill Park at least once a month. Q2 showed the times that the park is visited most frequently to be weekdays (19%), weekends (20%), during the day (18%) and year round (20%). 10% of respondents visit in the mornings and 6% in the early evenings. For Q3, 71% of respondents answered that they usually visit the park to go for a walk or run. Q4 showed that 47% of respondents visit the café at least once a month with a further 35% visiting more than once every few months. See Appendix for full data for all questions.

To Qs 5 and 6, 58% of respondents answered that they hadn't visited other cafes near to Golders Hill Park in the last year. Of the 39% that answered that they had visited other nearby cafes, the most cited reasons given were 'convenience of location' (37%) and quality of food (15%).

The three main reasons that respondents visit the café (Q7) are For a quick tea or coffee break (29%), To socialise with friends or family (21%) and At the start or end of a walk (17%). The least popular reasons chosen were As an alternative location to work from (0.5%) and Before or after attending an event nearby (1%). 42% of respondents visit the café with friends or family with children, 24% visit as a couple and 22% visit with adult friends or family (Q8).

In Q9, respondents were asked to select the two drink types they would most like to be served in the café. Respondents overwhelmingly selected Fresh brewed coffee/ tea with this option receiving 42% of the vote. Fresh fruit juices and smoothies came in second with 21% and Hot drinks to take away third with 16%. The option chosen least frequently was Alcoholic drinks with 4%.

Q10 asked respondents to select their two preferred types of food. Four options clearly came out on top: Sandwiches and cold snacks (12%), Main meals and hot food (12%), Cakes (11%) and Healthy options (10%). Hot snacks (9%), Breakfast pastries (8%) and Cold meals (8%) were also selected frequently. Of the 4% of 'Other' votes, 35 of the 109 comments related to ice cream and 18 related to kosher food options. Q11 shows that 37% of respondents would like Fresh/ homemade food options to form part of the food offer. A wide variety of options (18%), Health food (15%) and Vegetarian/ vegan options (14%) also proved popular.

Q12 sought to ascertain priorities for how the café is managed by asking respondents how strongly they agreed or disagreed with three statements. A clear priority is the café being run in an environmentally friendly manner with 83% agreeing and strongly agreeing. A total of 82% agreed or strongly agreed that the café should have a connection to the local area and 68% agreed or strongly agreed that the café should provide opportunities for local people, while 27% responded neutrally.

Finally, Quality of food and drink was selected as the most important aspect of the café with 34%. Good staff service was the second most popular option with 17%, followed by Affordability of food and drink with 16%.

Respondents were able to add any other comments or suggestions they might have. Of the 412 responses received, 86 comments related to the café retaining its individuality, 69 related to service, 52 related to quality of food and 48 related to ice cream.

3. Headline Findings/ Recommendations

The Golders Hill Park café should provide a simple, fresh and homemade offer.

The consultation process has revealed park users' aspirations for a simple, fresh and homemade food and drink offer. At focus groups, many comments expressed that menus should be kept small and simple in order to maintain a high level of quality. Quality of food and drink was valued highly throughout the process, with questionnaire respondents selecting this as the most important aspect of the café (34% of vote). However, the variety of food and drink on offer also emerged as the 3rd most common reason given for visiting other nearby cafes in Q5. A balance will need to be struck between quality and providing enough variety to satisfy the diverse dietary requirements of the local community.

There was a strong desire for the café to offer fresh and homemade food, with this ranking as the most popular food option. Options favoured throughout were sandwiches, main meals, changing specials (e.g. soups/ salads), hot and cold snacks, breakfast pastries, vegetarian/ vegan food and children's meals. High quality ice cream has emerged as a key priority in all engagement activities and was mentioned in the survey comments 83 times. Coffee and tea (42%) and juices and smoothies (21%) emerged as the drink options valued most highly.

The Golders Hill Park café should cater for all members of the community.

A key aspiration of participants for the café was as an inclusive space that reflects the diversity of the local community. Many suggestions were made for how best to provide for members of the community that adhere to certain dietary requirements, with kosher food in particular emerging as a priority for some. A total of 40 survey comments asked for kosher food options and some cited the lack of these as their reason for choosing other nearby cafes instead. Most focus group participants agreed that the café could not be "all things to all people" but must ensure to provide options that satisfy a diversity of dietary requirements. There was a view that high-quality vegetarian and vegan options and prepackaged kosher options should form a key part of the offer and an expectation that management have an understanding of the local community and their needs and strive to achieve a balance between quality, variety and freshness of food and drink for several types of diet.

Affordability also emerged as a key theme with comments highlighting the diverse socioeconomic backgrounds of park users and emphasising the café's role as an "invaluable community resource". In Q13, affordability of food and drink was rated as the 3rd most important aspect of the café with 16% of votes. Comments were also made about the need to ensure that the physical infrastructure of the café cater for all, with concerns raised about accessibility to the café and toilets.

The Golders Hill Park café should feel inviting and make the most of its space and location in the park.

This theme was clearly expressed in all engagement activities. Focus group participants discussed the need for the café to offer an inviting environment and 21% of survey respondents selected To socialise with friends and family as their main reason for visiting (ranked 2nd). The café décor was described in survey comments as "dated" and several comments were received throughout suggesting ways to change the layout and invest in furniture to make both the interior and exterior more inviting. Participants also suggested layout changes to remedy issues of overcrowding and waiting times, which most felt had improved with the introduction of an outdoor service window for coffees. There is scope for the next leaseholder to invest in the café layout and implement some of the suggested changes in order to create a more inviting atmosphere.

Participants commented on the "wonderful location" of the café and the "viewpoint over the park" and some expressed their aspirations for indoor and outdoor seating designed with the surrounding natural environment in

mind. 20% of respondents visit the park year round and some suggested outdoor cover to improve visitor experience on rainy and sunny days. It will be essential for the next leaseholder to have a vision for how to make the most of this space and location.

The Golders Hill Park café should be unique and managed in such a way that reflects the character of the local community.

A clear message coming out of the consultation process is that café users value the uniqueness and individuality of the café. In Q12, 82% of respondents either agreed or strongly agreed that the café should have a connection to the local area and respond to specific, local needs and 86 people left comments asking that the café not be managed by a chain. In focus groups, participants stressed the importance of a personal, local touch but agreed that the quality of the food and drink and the capability to provide options to suit the whole community was paramount.

Friendly, efficient service is clearly also valued highly. Participants chose staff offering good customer care as the second most important feature of the café with 17% in Q13. Staff service was mentioned in comments 69 times. This quote is reflective of the sentiment expressed in these comments: “I think it is essential to deliver a local, community feel for somewhere frequented by local people, some who have been visiting for generations”. Some participants called for the café to open earlier and close later in comments with 10% selecting that they visit the park in the mornings and 6% selecting early evenings in Q2. 83% of respondents to Q12 agreed or strongly agreed that the café should be run in an environmentally friendly manner.

4. Conclusions

Park users and local residents are clearly passionate about Golders Hill Park and its café, with many regarding the café to be an integral part of their experience using the park. Several residents expressed that the café holds a special place in their hearts and memories as a “community institution” that they have been visiting for generations. Others view it as a “vital amenity that serves a large number of people from within and beyond the borough”. The aspirations and priorities of the community that have emerged from the process, to uphold the high-quality offer, the individuality and the community spirit of the café, are therefore unsurprising.

It is recommended that the City Corporation take account of the feedback following this engagement process, focussing the tender documentation on the aspirations of those who participated in the process and the outcomes.

The main observations and feedback from the user engagement were that the café:

- should be unique and managed in such a way that reflects the character of the local community.
- should provide a simple, healthy, homemade offer.
- should cater for all members of the community.
- should feel inviting and make the most of its space and location in the Park.

Appendix:

Q1: How often do you visit Golders Hill Park?	
Every day	9%
More than once a week	29%
More than once a month	34%
More than once every few months	25%
Once a year or less	3%
Never	0%

Q2: When do you usually visit Golders Hill Park?	
Weekdays	19%
Weekends	20%
In the mornings	10%
During the day	18%
In the early evening	6%
In summer	7%
Year round	20%

Q3: What is usually your main reason for visiting Golders Hill Park?	
For a walk or run	71%
To walk the dog	10%
For a sports practice or event	0%
Other:	19%
<i>To bring children</i>	6%
<i>To visit the playground</i>	2%
<i>To visit the zoo</i>	2%
<i>To go to the café</i>	5%
<i>To relax</i>	1%
<i>To socialise</i>	2%
<i>For an ice cream</i>	1%

Q4: How often do you visit the café in Golders Hill Park?	
Every day	3%
More than once a week	17%
More than once a month	27%
More than once every few months	35%
Once a year or less	14%
Never	4%

Q5: Have you visited other cafes near to Golders Hill Park in the last 12 months?	
Yes	39%
No	58%
Don't know	3%

Q6: If yes, what was your reason for choosing those instead of the café in Golders Hill Park?	
Location was convenient	37%
Atmosphere	6%
Quality of food	15%
Quality of coffee	4%
Quality of service	4%
Variety of food	10%
Price	8%
For a change	2%
For kosher options	7%
Too crowded	4%
Golders Hill Park café closed	3%

Q7: What would be the two main reasons you would go to the café in Golders Hill Park?	
For a quick tea or coffee break	29%
For a quick snack	15%
For a meal, i.e. breakfast, lunch or dinner	13%
At the start or end of a walk	17%
To socialise with friends or family	21%
Whilst walking the dog	4%
Before or after attending an event nearby	1%
As an alternative location to work from	0%

Q8: Who would you be most likely to visit the café in Golders Hill Park with?	
Alone	9%
As a couple	24%
Friends/ family with children	42%
Friends/ family with adults only	22%
Members of groups or teams e.g. tennis	1%
With colleagues	1%
Other	1%

Q9: Which two drinks would you most like to be sold in the café?	
Fresh brewed coffee/tea	42%
Hot drinks to take away	16%
Hot chocolate	11%
Branded soft drinks	8%
More unique soft drinks	6%
Fresh fruit juices/smoothies	21%
Alcoholic drinks	4%
Other (please specify)	2%

Q10: Which two types of food would you most like to be sold in the café?	
Main meals/ hot food	12%
Cold meals, e.g. salads	8%
Hot snacks	9%
Sandwiches and cold snacks	12%
Packaged, take-out options; e.g. sandwiches	4%
Cakes	11%
Children's meals	5%
Baby food	1%
Specials which change regularly	6%
Breakfast pastries	8%
Cooked breakfasts	5%
Healthy options	10%
Snacks, e.g. crisps, fruit, chocolate	5%
Other (please specify)	4%

Q11: Which two drinks would you most like to be sold in the café?	
Health food	15%
Fresh/ homemade options	37%
Wide variety of options	18%
Organic	5%
Vegetarian/ vegan	14%
Kosher food options	6%
Food suitable for those with intolerances	3%
Other (please specify)	2%

Q12: How strongly do you agree or disagree with the following statements?					
It is important to me that the new management ...	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
... provides opportunities for local people to be employed and trained in the kiosk.	4%	1%	27%	36%	32%
... has a connection to the local area and runs the kiosk in a way that responds to specific, local needs.	4%	1%	13%	36%	46%
... runs the café in an eco-friendly manner e.g. biodegradable packaging, recycling.	4%	1%	12%	34%	49%

Q13: Which of the following is most important to you in relation to what the café in Golders Hill Park offers?	
Quality of food and drink	34%
Affordability of food and drink	16%
That the café is environmentally friendly	8%
Links to the local community/local area	7%
A wide range of food and drink	5%
Healthy food and drink	10%
Staff offering good customer service	17%
Speed of service	3%

Q15: Do you have any other comments or suggestions you would like to share with us about the café in in Golders Hill Park?	
Theme:	No. of comments
Individuality of café	86
Environmentally friendly	8
Quality of food	52
Ice cream	48
Opening hours	10
Atmosphere	30
Price	18
Accessibility	7
Service	69
Dietary requirements	14