



The Friends of Doxford Park



2010

*‘.....our most important achievement
has been to stay together as a group
during the last eight years.
We don't always agree, but firm
friendships have developed
and we are stronger for it.’*

*Chair
Friends of Doxford Park*



The Lake

The Friends of Doxford Park

The Lake Project

*The Friends of Doxford Park
56 Bishops way
Chapelgarth
Sunderland
SR3 2SH*

*Tel. 0191 5289146
Fax. 01915438502*

E-mail chairman@doxfordpark.org.uk





The greenhouse & gardeners against the north wall.

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Blue House Youth Project

Introduction

In 2001 the Sunderland City Council (SCC) decided to encourage the setting up of 'Friends of Parks Groups', it was hoped that by their formation extra resources both in money and time would become available. So, the Friends of Doxford Park (FODP) were formed in September 2001, a constitution was created and a committee elected.

All members are VOLUNTEERS and give their time and effort freely.

For the first 12 months or so, the group struggled to find a direction, until a decision was made to split their endeavours into two. The first was to continue the original role, which was to help find funds to help the officers of the Council to improve the infrastructure of the park and to stop the slow deterioration of the buildings and landscape. The second front was, to encourage the local schools to become involved and work with the FODP to learn about the history of the park and to enjoy the natural and man made attractions of the park.

The FODP are now in their ninth year and have, with a dogged determination, continued to play a part in conjunction with Sunderland City Council. Like all partnerships we have had our disagreements, but still remain committed to improving Doxford Park.

The group only have a small membership and none have any experience in the 'fundraising field', so finding major funding has been difficult and hard work. We are now receiving help from officers of Sunderland City Council and feel more confident that we will at last achieve some benefit for park users and the local community.

The Friends of Doxford Park's Achievements

As stated in the introduction the Friends of Doxford Park (FODP) are now in their ninth year, during these years we have had many achievements, some big, some small, a few are listed below.

- ✚ Since 2003 we have along with our various partners, entertained and educated over 2,500 local school children.
- ✚ Planted the first trees in the park since the land was bequeathed from Aline Doxford to Sunderland City Council.
- ✚ Worked in partnership with Sunderland Social Services staff and trainee's from Bishopwearmouth Horticultural Nursery, to transform part of the walled garden into an organised and peaceful retreat.
- ✚ Bought and planted, with the help of local school children, thousands of crocus, daffodil, bluebell and snowdrop bulbs.

We have organised Teddy Bears Picnic's, a brass band concert, with choir, and litter picks. Working with staff from Farringdon Community College we have had Community Days, where pupils come into the park to remove weeds, sweep up and remove dead leaves and carry out litter picks.

For the past 3 years we have received an award each year in the Sunderland in Bloom, Civic Awards competition. In 2007 and 2008 we came first in the 'The best Community Project' for the South area. In 2009 we received an award of merit in the same category. The first place went to the Sunderland and North Durham Royal Society for the Blind, however our Chairman, Tom Cranston had been involved with this group in 2009, so in part we managed to retain a piece of the first prize.

However our most important achievement has been to stay together as a group over the last eight years. We don't always agree, but firm friendships have developed and we are stronger for it.

Event and Special Days in the Park

Since 2003 we have along with our various partners, entertained and educated over 2,500 local school children.



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Bought and planted, with the help of local school children, thousands of Crocus, Daffodil and Snowdrop bulbs.



Music in a Walled Garden

June 2007



Heritage Weekend – Sept. 2008

**Flower arrangements
by
Herrington Flower Club**



**United Utilities Team Building Day
sponsored by**

Groundwork

August 2009



**Wild Flower Planting
Sponsored by**

**Sunderland City Council Park
Dept.**

October 2009



A Brief History of Doxford House

(*1) The estate was once part of the Silksworth Hall manorial lands owned by the Robinson family. It was separated from the main estate before the 1600s. The history of the Robinson estate can be found in Surtees book 'The History of County Durham'. A medieval Chantry chapel lies under the ground at the side of the house - hence the name of the area - Chapel Garth.

In 1775 - 1780 William Johnson decided to build the mansion house at Silksworth, the fine moulded ceilings date from this time and is still visible and carefully preserved in the house today. William Johnson then tried to let the property, according to an advert in Newcastle papers in 1783. He died in 1792 leaving the property to a friend, the lawyer Hendry Hopper of Durham.

Hendry in turn left the estate to his nephew Thomas Hopper. His daughter and heiress was Priscilla Marie Hopper who married General Beckwith. They built the main entrance, which has the Beckwith arms carved above the front door, the Winter Gardens and drained much of the surrounding land. The Beckwith family moved to Shropshire about 1890, there is still a Captain Beckwith living in London. The estate was then leased to John Craven (British Ropes) who died in 1902. Then Charles Doxford took a 99 year lease. His brother Robert also bought Silksworth Hall (the second one) at the same time.

Charles Doxford, with the help of his Head Gardner Henry Samuel Whitely extensively laid out the gardens and lake before the 1st World War. Henry Whitely came from Lowther Castle and was responsible in 1885 for the displays and floral decorations for the visit of Kaiser William II. Charles Doxford's ship building company was then at its height and he was a very wealthy man. His son Charles Junior lived at Burdon Hall, whilst his daughter Aline Doxford continued to live at Silksworth/Doxford House after her father's death in 1935. Her mother had died many years before (they are both buried in St. Matthew's, Silksworth).

Aline Doxford on her death, in 1968, bequeathed the house and estate to Sunderland Corporation. Her will was declared at £292,231. The house was renamed by the Corporation to Doxford House in honour of the contribution made to the town by the Doxford Shipbuilding Company.

The house was originally taller; a storey was removed after fire damage. The date 1847 is marked in the rafters, and a wing was pulled down by Aline Doxford at the time of the 2nd World War, as she thought the house too big for one person. Her brother had the semicircular wing as his quarters before his marriage; he later died in the Lake District where he and his wife had gone to live.

The ghost of General Beckwith has been sighted many times since the 1930s at the foot of the stairs and in the master bedroom.

*(*1) The above information was provided by Doug Smith, a local historian whose Grandfather Henry Samuel Whiteley was responsible for the majority of the features in the park and has left his signature in the roof space in Doxford House.*

The house was occupied by the Sunderland Polytechnic from 1969 to 1992 when the Polytechnic became University of Sunderland and was mainly used for student accommodation.

The Lazarus Centre was started to feed and clothe the poor and underprivileged people of Sunderland. Through this work and personal tragedy involving a family member, it became apparent to the trustees how desperate was the need for Alcohol & Drug treatment in the North East. The Lazarus Centre moved into this field of treatment in 1998. Doxford house was chosen as being ideal for this purpose and was purchased as near derelict. The Lazarus Centre opened its doors in the summer of 1999. During a period of 6 years, over 500 people were treated at the centre from all areas of the UK, its reputation stood second to none.

Around 2005/06 the Trustees of the Lazarus Centre found the costs of running the building too expensive, so the building was sold.

The buyer had intended to use the building as small hotel; however Planning was refused, they wanted less rooms, but this wasn't a viable option for the buyer. The building was then sold to a small consortium. The consortium has submitted plans to the Council for uses, varying from apartments and town houses to a hotel.

The building is currently empty and in need of serious repair.

Why the Community Needs Doxford Park

Doxford Park is the lungs of the area, providing a peaceful retreat from the hustle and bustle of daily life.

The Walled garden, in particular, can be a haven of peace and quiet, especially for the workers from companies based within Doxford International Business Park, the local shops and from passers by who regularly stop and enjoy a lunch break.



With the continuing concern nationwide, about healthy living and especially 'Obesity', the park is a ready made free resource to be used for recreation. Walking, jogging or just enjoying a picnic on the grass, these activities can provide exercise and a release from today's stress filled world.

The local schools use the park as an outside classroom, allowing the children to learn about the flora and fauna and about citizenship. For example how leaving litter behind makes any area, not just the park look untidy and can be a danger to birds and small animals that inhabit the area. They also take part in games devised by us that help them understand the history of the park and also the types and benefits of fruit and vegetables. With regard to fruit and vegetables, it has surprised us as to how many children do not know the names or indeed the uses of some common vegetables.



Many people in the area still remember when the park was in private hands and recall many stories and events. They hope that the Friends of Doxford Park along with their partners can make a change for the better and bring a sense of pride back into the community.

Doxford Park - The Current Position

Doxford Park has only just been holding it's own for many years now, however it is not the only park like this in Sunderland, nor indeed in the whole of the United Kingdom. As you will know parks and green spaces in cities, towns and villages are not statutory duties, unlike education and Social Services etc. Funding for parks comes at the bottom of the Councils spending, that is not to say that the local communities and 'Friends' groups cannot have a say and indeed find funding to help improve their own local park.

The park requires a lot of work to bring it up to a good standard, about £3-4 million. This money is currently not available to us or indeed many parks without Lottery funding and getting that amount requires serious support and very hard work.

So, we the FODP have broken up the park into small sections and are trying to find funding to improve each section, one at a time. We have improved an area within the Walled Garden in the last few years and we now have set our sights on the lake.

The lake at one time was serviced by water from the surrounding area, but due to the building of houses, roads and a shopping centre the water is now down to a trickle. The water that enters the lake now is rain water, (from the sky) and a lot of contaminated water from local houses and a few businesses. With the help of Northumbria Water the Councils Environmental Health Team and our local Councillor, Elizabeth Gibson, the amount of contaminated water has been reduced.



Contaminated water entering the lake.



To enable the water to remain uncontaminated we need to investigate the water sources in more detail and find a way to maintain the quality and improve the flow of the water. In order to do this we need to find funding.

The Solution

The project is to regenerate the area around the lake, due to contamination by the misconnections of domestic toilets, dishwashers and washing machines into the stormwater system. This adding to the existing problem of decomposing materials in the lake bed has resulted in contamination of the water in the lake.

It is intended to remove the contaminated material, make good the lake edge and associated footpaths prior to the installation of a recirculation/oxygenation system that will improve the quality of the Lake and subsequent stream.

Funding

For the last 12 months, in partnership with officers from the Councils Landscape Section, we have been working to find finance to further the Lake Project. We have been granted, from Sunderland City Councils SIB fund £30,000 plus £5,000 from SIP, this is seed capital, that will help us attract further match funding from external sources.

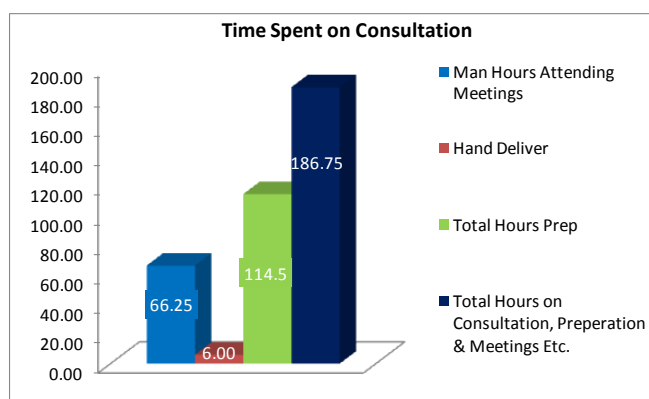
We are applying to other funders to try and secure funds that will further enhance the lake and surrounding area.

If we are successful with our applications we will be able to start work later this year.

Consultation

Part of the application process required by funders is that we the FODP must consult the park users and the local community. We have consulted many groups in the Doxford Area, Tom Cranston (Chair), Colin Barksby (Vice Chair) and Ann Barksby (Treas.) and other members have invested considerable amounts of time and effort in this task. The total hours expended on this task are shown in the graph below.

Using the Heritage Lottery's scale for volunteer time we have spent 188 hours on this consultation, which is worth approximately £3,200. This figure doesn't include costs for ink, paper, refreshments and travel.



The Meetings

The public watched a short DVD and then a verbal expanded version of the facts relating to the Lake Project was presented, followed by a question and answer session. A questionnaire was then handed out to seek the audience's views.

We also hand delivered Questionnaires to 300 homes surrounding the park, we have had a return rate of 27.3%.

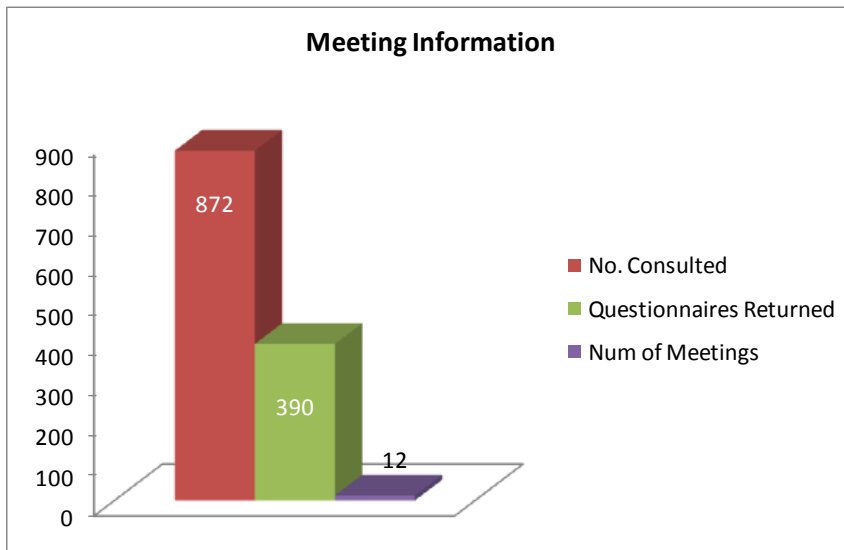
We found it to be an interesting experience, talking to people aged from 5 years of age to, shall we say the older person. A lot of people remember when Doxford Park was in first class condition and that it now needs some TLC.

Groups and Organisations Consulted

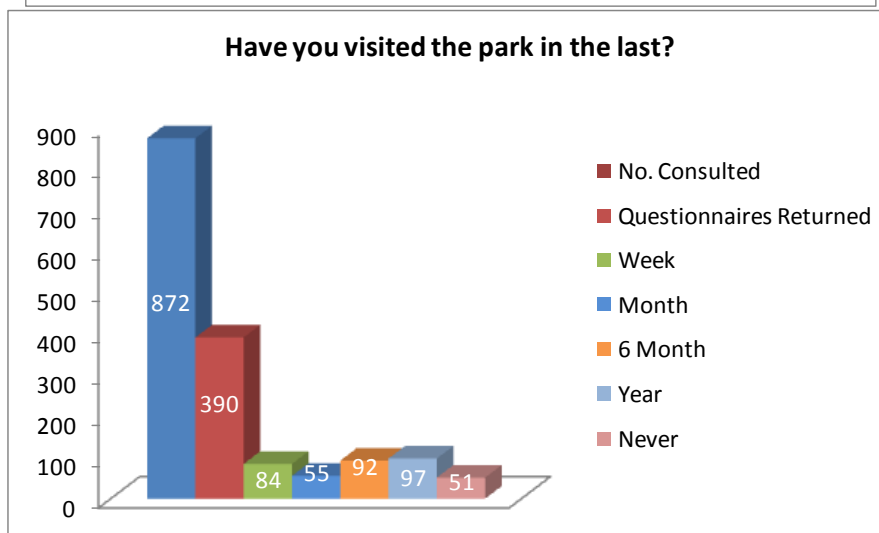
Who was Consulted		When	Details of Consultation	Questionnaires Completed
Croftside House Sheltered Accommodation	Adults over 55	April 2010	Talk with DVD presentation	14
Mill Hill Primary School	Children and Teaching staff	April 2010	Talk with DVD presentation	162
South Area Forum	Members of local and City wide organisations	April 2010	Talk with DVD presentation	21
Herrington Heritage	Adults mixed age group	May 2010	Talk with DVD presentation	18
New Silksworth Junior School	Children, Helpers & Teaching staff	May 2010	Talk & History Treasure Hunt	3
Church View Patients Group	Adults mixed age groups	June 2010	Talk with DVD presentation	10
Box Project (13-19) Youth Group	Young people and Adult Youth Workers	June 2010	Talk with DVD presentation	5
Box Project (8-13) Youth Group	Young people and Adult Youth Workers	June 2010	Talk with DVD presentation	9
South Area Parents Support Group	Adults of mixed aged groups	June 2010	Talk	9
Doxford Park Forum	Adults mixed age groups	June 2010		13
Fit, Fab & 50+	Ladies over 50	June 2010	Talk with DVD presentation	12
Doxford Park Toddlers Group	Adults of mixed age groups	June 2010	Talk in Walled Garden	32
Postal Questionnaires	300 Properties surrounding the park	June 2010	Letter plus questionnaire	82
Total Issued	872	44.7%	Total Returned	390

The Results

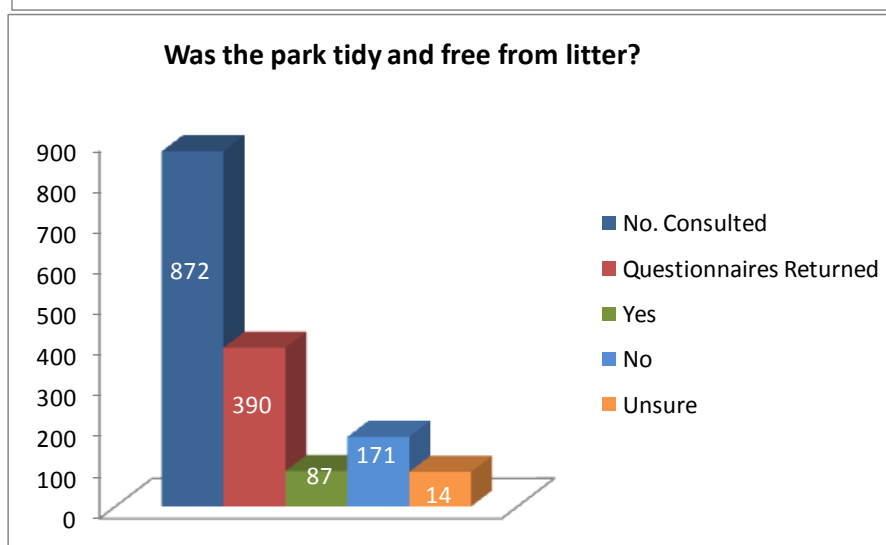
The results of the consultation can be found in the graphs below.



44.7% of questionnaires delivered or handed out at meetings have been completed.

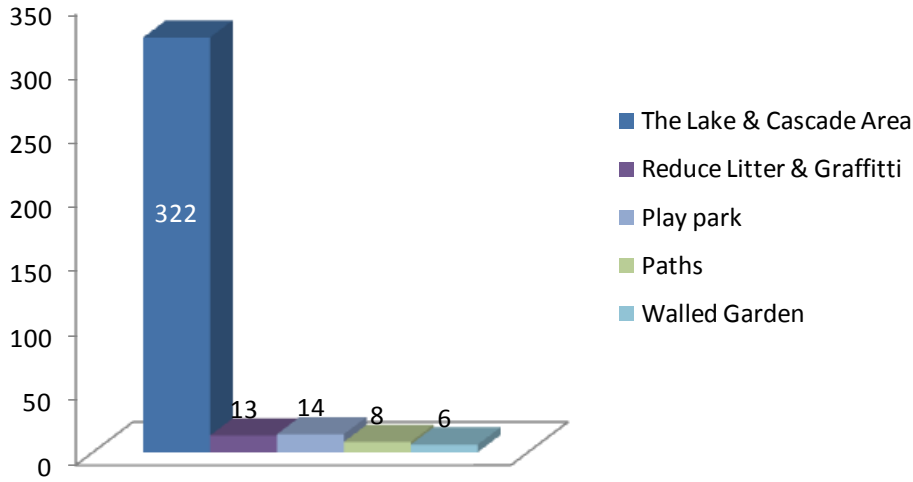


84.1% completing a questionnaire has visited the park in the last year.



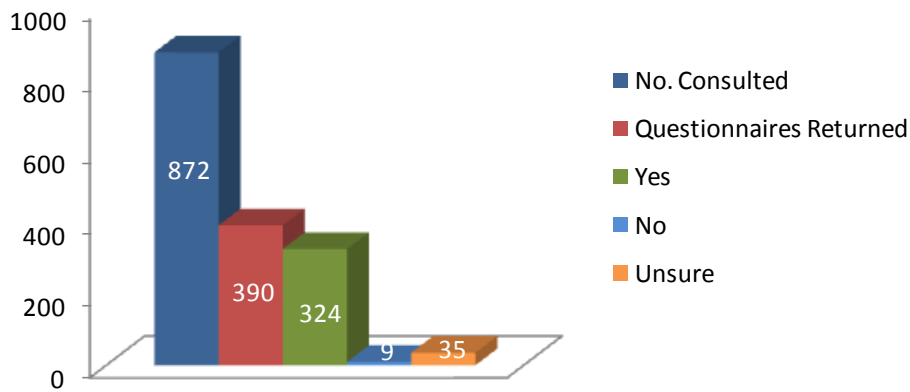
Only 22.3% stated that the park was tidy and litter free.

What Area of Park improved First?



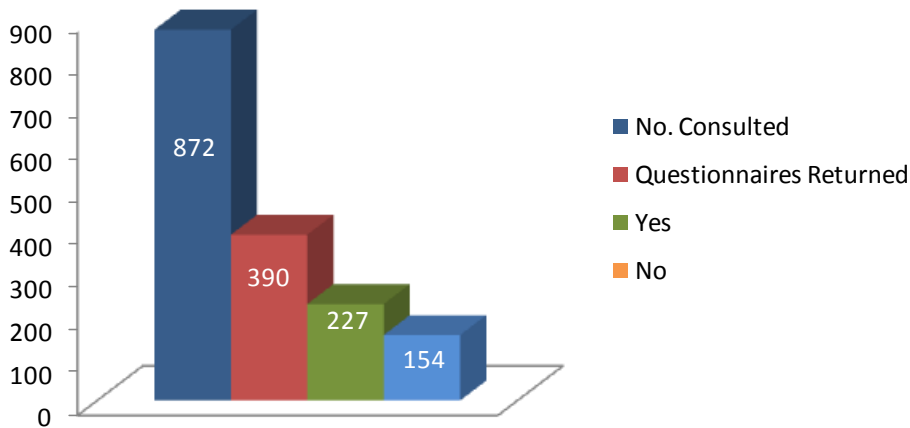
82.6% of respondents stated that the lake and cascade area was their main concern.

Our priority is to have the lake and surroundings improved?

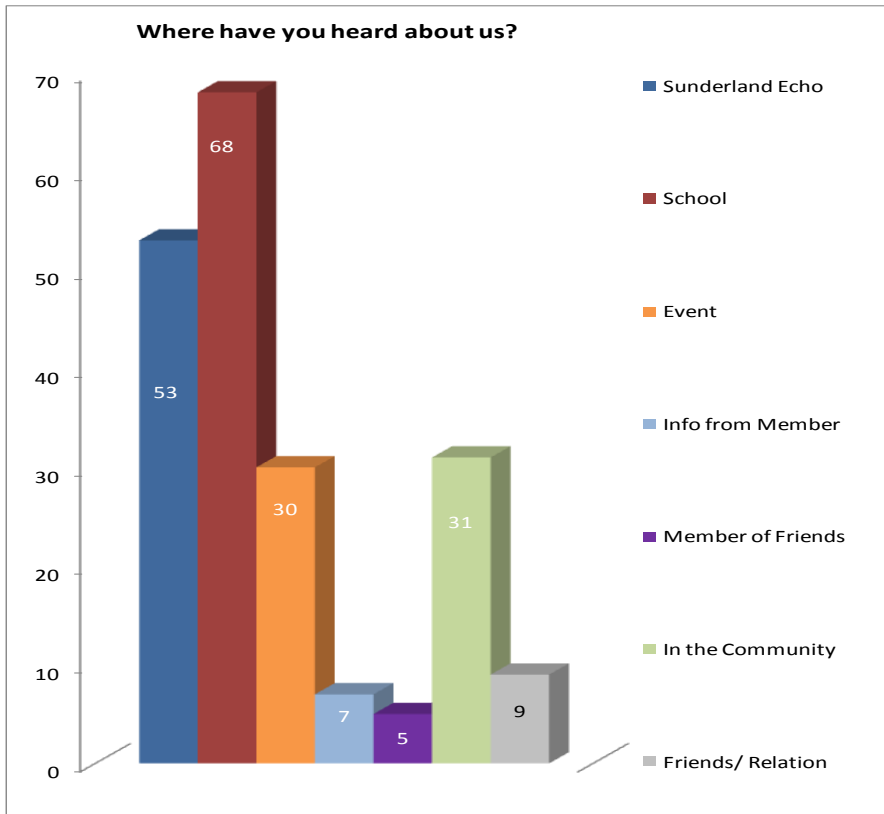


83.1% of respondents agreed with our priority of having the lake and surroundings improved.

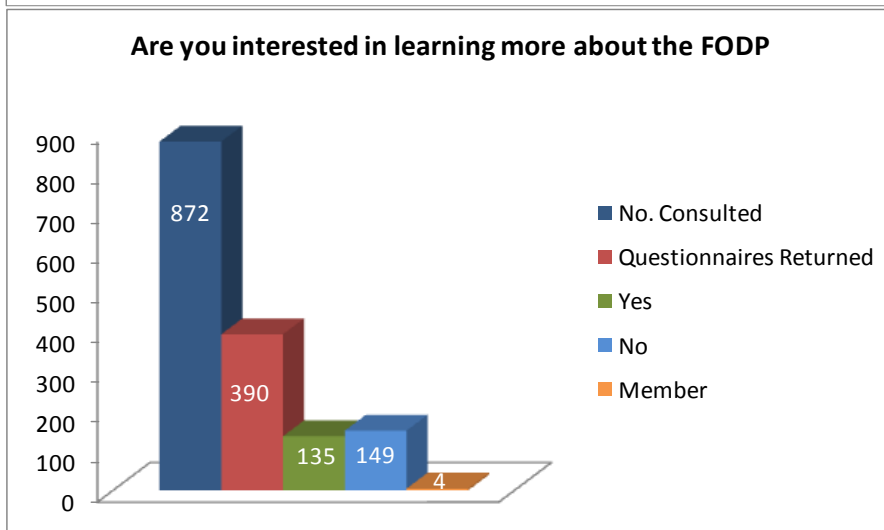
Have you heard of the FODP, before this presentation?



58.2% respondents have heard about the Friends of Doxford Park.



13.6% those adults who answered had heard about our group from articles etc. in the local newspaper, the Sunderland Echo.



34.6% of respondents stated that they are interested in learning more about our group and helping us with our activities.

What the Data Tells Us

It is obvious from the above information that the local community have agreed with our major priority of having the lake cleaned out and restored. Time and time again during the consultations we have been overwhelmed by the sense of frustration regarding the condition of the lake. There are still many people who remember the park from their childhood, a park looking tidy, well groomed and beautiful.

The consultations have given us the members, a lot of pleasure, yes it has been hard work and I am sure that we have spent more time than the graph shows, but it has given us vital information.

It would appear that there are more people than we thought that may want to help us. Also we need to do more to advertise ourselves and our activities. We are well known in the local schools; in fact schools love to attend our events as we have a record of being a very professional and well organised group.

To Conclude

It is obvious just by walking around Doxford Park that time; effort and money are required to make the park a vibrant, more useful facility for the community and for the people of the City of Sunderland.

The FODP are confident that when we are successful in our bids for funding, that the area around the lake will once again bring people to the park.

The experience gained from this task has given us an insight into the funding process and has given us renewed strength for the future.

It will show the local community that we can, by working together, become an efficient and effective force. By building on our achievements we can stop the decline of the park and continue the improvement to the parks infrastructure, ensuring we have a facility fit for use by everyone.

The recent demolition of houses on the Doxford Park Housing estate, the building of new homes, along with excellent landscaping and green spaces by Gentoo, coupled with improvements to the park, will further enhance this part of Sunderland.

These improvements will allow the local community to restore their pride in their area and give an improved quality of life to all age groups, by having a safer and healthy environment to live, work and play in.

Sunderland
in Bloom 2009
Civic Awards Competition

Class: 2

Winner: FRIENDS OF DOXFORD PARK
(AWARD OF MERIT)

Councillor Dennis Richardson,
The Right Worshipful the Mayor of Sunderland.

D. Richardson

Farrington Community Sports College



Certificate of Participation

This is to certify that

FRIENDS OF DOXFORD PARK

made a significant contribution to the
Community Day
at
Farrington Community Sports College
on
November 9th 2007

In recognition of your valuable support in the
Government's "Every Child Matters" initiative

D. C. Thornton
Headteacher



Sunderland
in Bloom 2007

Civic Awards Competition

Class: 2

Winner: FRIENDS OF DOXFORD PARK AND ADULT SERVICES

Councillor Les Scott,
The Right Worshipful the Mayor of Sunderland.

L. Scott

Sunderland
in Bloom 2008

Civic Awards Competition

Class: 2

Winner: FRIENDS OF DOXFORD PARK

Councillor Mary Smith,
The Right Worshipful the Mayor of Sunderland.

M. Smith