



Parks For Nature

A greener Rochford....



A Report on Consultation
Findings

June 2021

Purpose....

The purpose of this report is to provide details and analysis of the responses received from stakeholders and residents to the councils "Parks for Nature" consultation held between the 17th May and the 14th June 2021. The consultation required a questionnaire to be completed covering issues relating to climate change, wildlife, biodiversity and open space priorities. Specifically feedback was sought on questions formulated to help inform an action plan the council's policy and approach towards the management of its open spaces that could positively contribute to its objective of becoming carbon neutral by 2030. In total 330 responses were received.

A Results Snapshot....

What priority is climate change for you?

High Priority 65%

By creating a more diverse landscape within our parks, do you believe this will have a positive or negative effect on climate change?

Positive 92%

Which Ward do you live in?

Roche South Ward 13%

How should we focus our management of our parks?

Wildlife & Biodiversity 88%

Suitable land should be considered for rewilding and tree planting.

Strongly Agree 80%

I would like to see more meadows in parks.

Strongly Agree 59%

I would like to see more trees in parks.

Strongly Agree 76%

What would you consider a top priority for your parks and open spaces?

Nature & Wildlife 62%

How much money should we be spending on the following features of open space: Litter?

More 66%

How much money should we be spending on the following features of open space: Trees?

More 81%

How much money should we be spending on the following features of open space: Playgrounds?

Same 57%

How much money should we be spending on the following features of open space: Shrubs and Gardens?

Same 47%

How much money should we be spending on the following features of open space: Grass Cutting?

Same 52%

How much money should we be spending on the following features of open space: Sports?

Same 52%

Introduction....

Rochford District Council is committed to being **Carbon Neutral by 2030**.

The approach to the management of its open spaces will become an increasingly important component in its commitment to meet this target. To help meet the target Rochford District Council is about to change the way in which its parks and open spaces are managed.

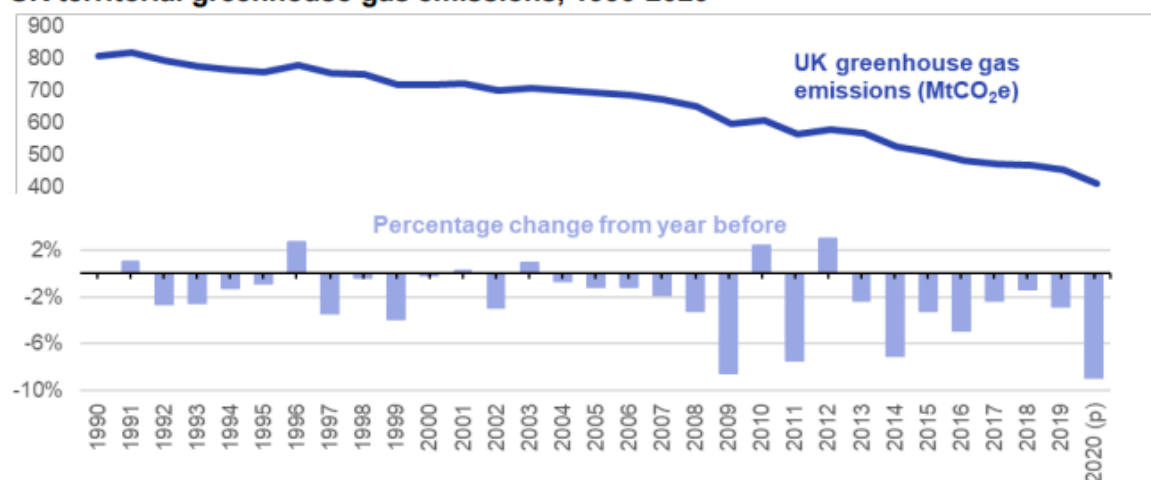
What does it mean to be Carbon Neutral?

Rochford District Council will be carbon neutral if the amount of CO₂ emissions it puts into the atmosphere is the same as the amount of CO₂ emissions it removes from the atmosphere.

The Climate Change Act of 2008 committed the UK to an 80% reduction in carbon emissions relative to the levels in the 1990 to be achieved by **2050**. In June 2019 secondary legislation was passed that extended that target to 100%. This would keep the UK in line with the commitments it made as part of the Paris Agreement in 2016 to keep global warming under 2 degrees.¹

The UK's emissions of all greenhouse gasses has fallen steadily over the last 30 years, though levels have risen globally. At the end of 2020 total UK greenhouse gas emissions were 48.8% lower than they were in 1990.²

UK territorial greenhouse gas emissions, 1990-2020



What are the benefits of being Carbon Neutral?

CO₂ is one of 6 major greenhouse gases along with methane, nitrous oxide, hydrofluorocarbons, perfluorocarbons and sulphur hexafluoride.* Carbon dioxide

¹ <https://www.instituteforgovernment.org.uk/explainers/net-zero-target>

² 2020 UK Greenhouse Gas Emissions, Provisional Figures – Department for Business, Energy & Industrial Strategy

makes up the bulk of these. This is principally produced by burning fossil fuels in, for example, coal fuelled power stations; the main sources for the other greenhouse gasses include industrial processes and waste management, such as agriculture and landfill sites. Combined, these accounted for around 19% of all UK emissions in 2018. By aiming to be Carbon Neutral the UK is committing itself to keeping global warming under 2 degrees.

How is Rochford District Council Contributing?

In July 2020, Rochford District Council made a commitment to work towards becoming carbon neutral by 2030 for its own operations. The purpose of the policy is to ensure that Rochford District Council can achieve its goal of becoming Carbon Neutral by 2030.

The key documents to this commitment are Rochford's Carbon Neutral 2030 Policy and its Carbon Neutral 2030 Action Plan:

These documents set out aims to:

- Reduce the consumption of energy and water across all of our activities.
- Purchase energy from renewable sources wherever possible.
- Minimise our impacts of travel by using more sustainable travel solutions or alternatives to travel.
- Improve our performance to prevent all types of pollution and reduce CO2 and other harmful emissions from our activities.
- Work with and where possible require our suppliers and contractors to reduce the impact of the goods and services by considering whole life costs and ending our use of single use plastics.
- Minimise the production of waste from our own activities and adhere to the principles of the waste hierarchy.
- **Protect, conserve and enhance our District's high quality natural environment and its biodiversity whilst improving our parks and open spaces, public rights of ways and green corridors.**
- Ensure environmental risks and opportunities are managed positively.

How will the Management of Open Spaces Help Meet Carbon Neutral Targets?

Parks and green spaces help to reduce the effects of **climate change** by directly contributing to a reduction in carbon dioxide emissions, reduction in the effects of extreme weather events, and building more resilient habitats to help sustain wildlife.

What Does the Council Plan to Do?

Rochford District Council's Open Spaces team manages around 310 hectares of land in the District. 190 hectares is natural or semi-natural, including around 140 hectares of trees and woodland.

The council aims to respond to the demand of meeting its carbon neutral target by:

- Planting more trees and other vegetation to remove carbon dioxide from the atmosphere.
- To have a range meadows and plantations for habitats and wildlife to promote species resilience and biodiversity.
- To plant and manage trees to help cool down urban centres, provide shade and capture harmful particles.
- To introduce meadows and vegetation to help address flood risks by storing and slowing down water flow upstream.

Parks and green spaces in Rochford District already bring many benefits and contribute to lowering the effects of climate change as part of a combined network of habitats.

There is opportunity to increase this effect by planting more trees and woodlands and to develop alternative approaches to managing grassland. In general, adopting a more environmentally sustainable approach to managing parks and green spaces can be considered while continuing to deliver the benefits to health, wellbeing, recreation and social bonds.

Biodiverse Grassland and Meadow Areas

Grassland and meadow areas are of high value to biodiversity because their relaxed mowing regimes allow the flowering plants to compete with grasses. Relaxed mowing regimes also allow all vegetation to grow higher and reach maturity.

This more relaxed approach to grassland and meadow management diversifies the range of vegetation structures (e.g. rosettes, stems, leaves, flowers and seed heads) which can support a high diversity and high overall numbers of insects, and in doing so more predators such as birds and mammals. This can be achieved by:

- Encouraging wider species diversity and by planting vigorous bulbs and wildflowers along grassland and meadow margins.
- Making sure long grass and meadows are available to wildlife, by leaving an area uncut over the winter months
- Allowing an area to develop into scrub (e.g. brambles, shrubs and tree seedlings) for improved habitat diversity

Trees & Woodland Planting

The “Biodiversity in Urban Gardens” (BUGS) research project carried out at the University of Sheffield studied urban gardens to identify which aspects of a garden made the biggest impact on biodiversity. It showed that trees made the

biggest positive impact on both the number of species and the number of individual organisms present in a garden. The positive effect of trees on biodiversity applies to parks as well as gardens, so it is important to keep a good range of tree species in our parks and open spaces.

Trees clearly have an important role to play in meeting climate change commitments and there is a global need to increase the amount of tree cover. Increasing tree planting within parks and green spaces can be achieved by:

- Finding land suitable for tree and woodland planting
- Creating shelter belts / fringe planting in parks
- Utilising banked verges & banked areas in parks

Any tree planting should be appropriate for the location and growing conditions and a suitable species to prevent issues that could happen in the future as the trees mature.

Ponds and wetlands

A proportion of Rochford's public parks and green spaces have ponds or lakes. Predicted changes in rainfall patterns will mean that ponds may partially dry out in hot, dry weather. They may also flood more frequently in wetter periods.

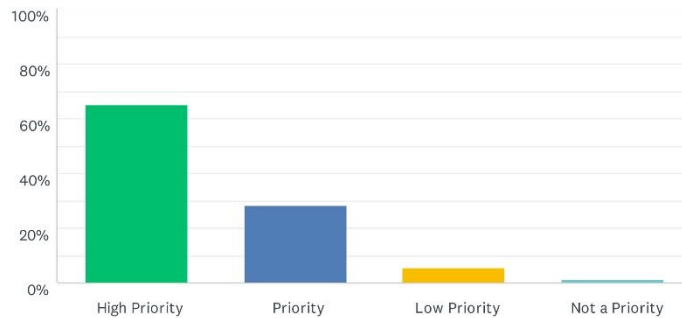
This means there is an increased need for new ponds and wetland areas to increase the underlying capacity for sustainable urban drainage but also an opportunity to diversify species of flora and fauna. There will also more need to collect and keep winter rainfall for use at other times of year.

As climate change puts more pressure on biodiversity there will be more need for ponds and associated wetlands to add to biodiversity and local habitat networks.

Questionnaire Results....

Question 1: What priority is climate change for you?

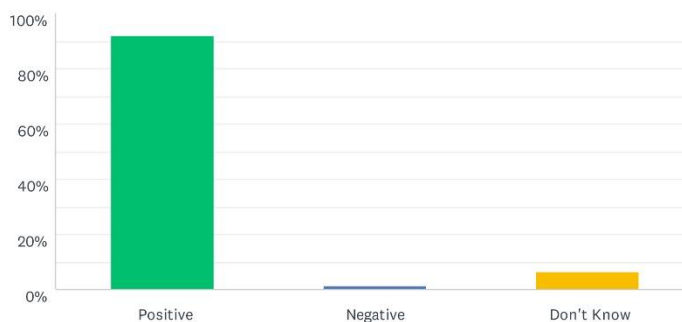
Rochford residents and stakeholders consider climate change a high priority, 64.94%, with a further 28.35% of respondent indicating that it is a priority. 5.49% consider climate change a low priority and 1.22% not a priority.



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
High Priority	64.94%	213
Priority	28.35%	93
Low Priority	5.49%	18
Not a Priority	1.22%	4
TOTAL		328

Question 2: By creating a more diverse landscape within our parks (e.g. meadows, rewilding, tree planting etc.), do you believe this will have a positive or negative effect on climate change?

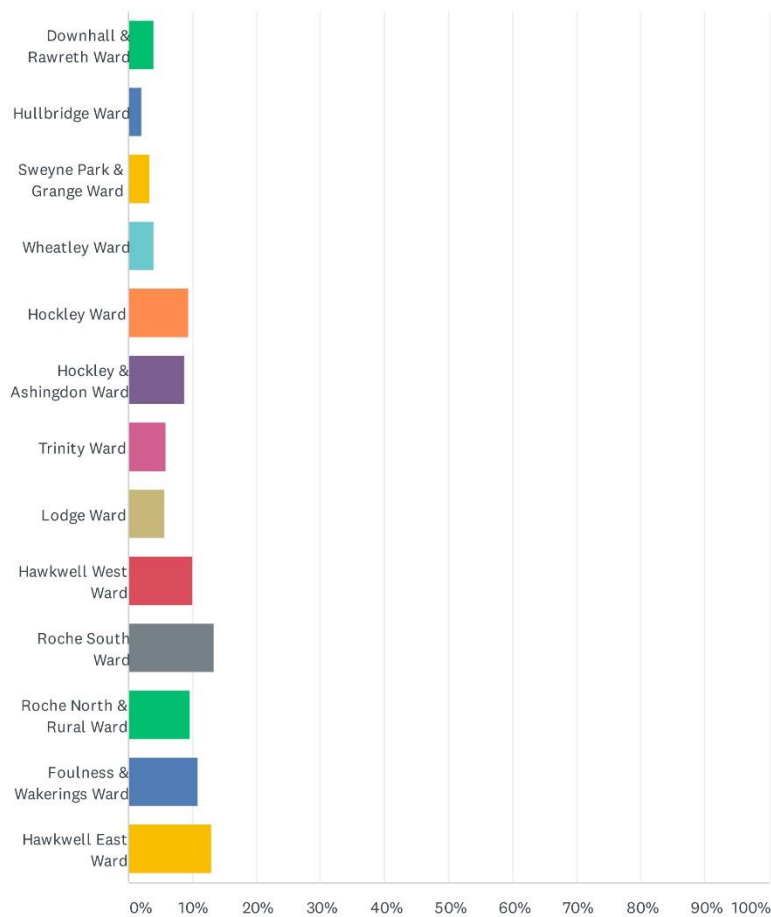
92.07% of responders indicated that creating a more diverse landscape within the district would have a positive effect on climate change. 1.52% of responders thought that it would have a negative effect and 6.40% were unsure.



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Positive	92.07%	302
Negative	1.52%	5
Don't Know	6.40%	21
TOTAL		328

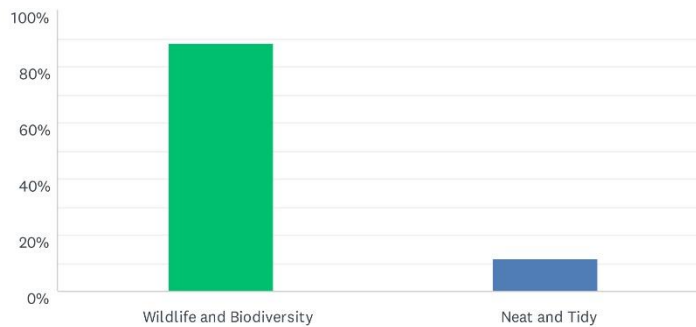
Question 3: Which Ward do you live in?

Residents from all of the Wards took part in the survey. The greatest proportion of responses came from residents in the Roche South Ward, 43 or 13.35% and the least number of responses from the Hullbridge Ward, 7 or 2.17%.



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Downhall & Rawreth Ward	4.04%	13
Hullbridge Ward	2.17%	7
Sweyne Park & Grange Ward	3.42%	11
Wheatley Ward	4.04%	13
Hockley Ward	9.32%	30
Hockley & Ashingdon Ward	8.70%	28
Trinity Ward	5.90%	19
Lodge Ward	5.59%	18
Hawkwell West Ward	9.94%	32
Roche South Ward	13.35%	43
Roche North & Rural Ward	9.63%	31
Foulness & Wakerings Ward	10.87%	35
Hawkwell East Ward	13.04%	42
TOTAL		322

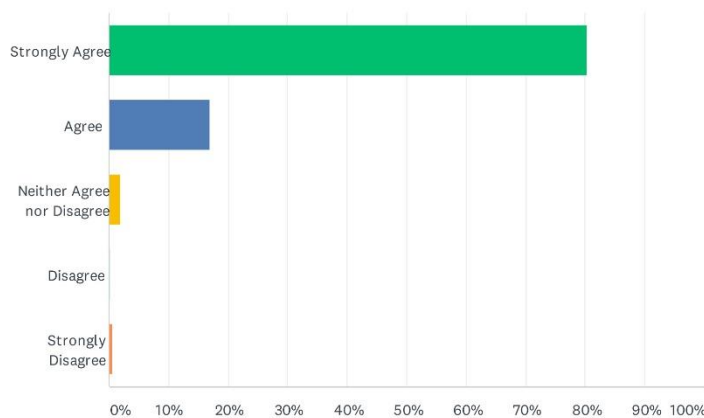
Question 4 asked residents to consider if the focus of management of the districts parks should be biased towards wildlife and biodiversity or a neat and tidy appearance. 88.15% of the residents who replied considered that the focus should be on wildlife and biodiversity and 11.85% on a neat and tidy appearance.



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Wildlife and Biodiversity	88.15%	290
Neat and Tidy	11.85%	39
TOTAL		329

Question 5: Suitable land should be considered for rewilding and tree planting.

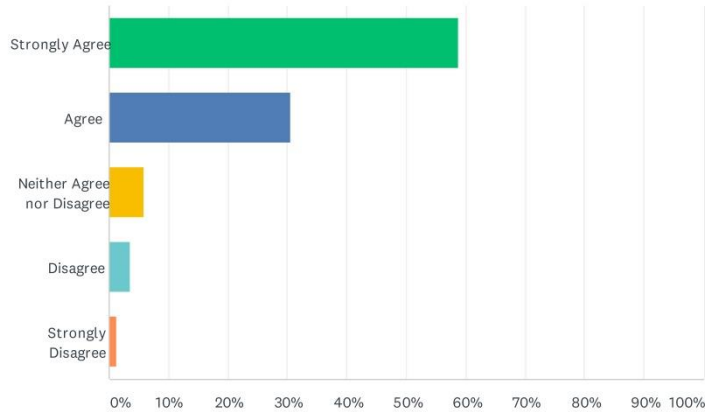
80.24% of responders strongly agreed with this statement, and a further 17.02% agreed. Between them, these responses equated to 320 of the 329 responses. 1 responder disagreed with the statement and 2 strongly disagreed, with the remainder undecided on whether suitable land should be considered for rewilding and tree planting.



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Strongly Agree	80.24%	264
Agree	17.02%	56
Neither Agree nor Disagree	1.82%	6
Disagree	0.30%	1
Strongly Disagree	0.61%	2
TOTAL		329

Question 6: I would like to see more meadows in parks.

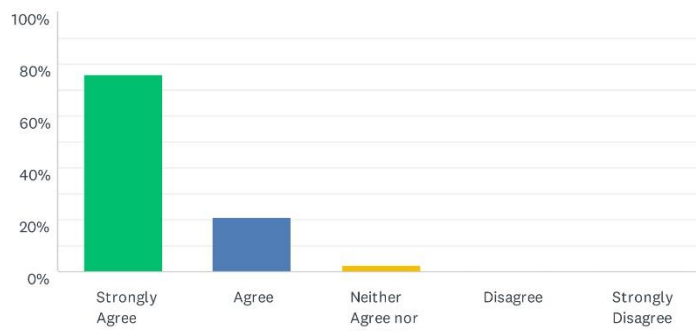
The vast majority of the residents, 58.79%, who responded to this statement strongly agreed with it. 30.61% also agree. 12 residents disagreed and 4 strongly disagreed. The remaining responders neither agreed nor disagreed 5.76%.



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Strongly Agree	58.79%	194
Agree	30.61%	101
Neither Agree nor Disagree	5.76%	19
Disagree	3.64%	12
Strongly Disagree	1.21%	4
TOTAL		330

Question 7: I would like to see more trees in parks.

Again the vast majority of Rochford residents would like to see more trees in the districts parks. 75.76% said that they strongly agreed with this statement and a further 20.91% agreed with the statement. Only 2 disagreed and 1 strongly disagreed with the statement with a further 8 neither agreeing nor disagreeing.

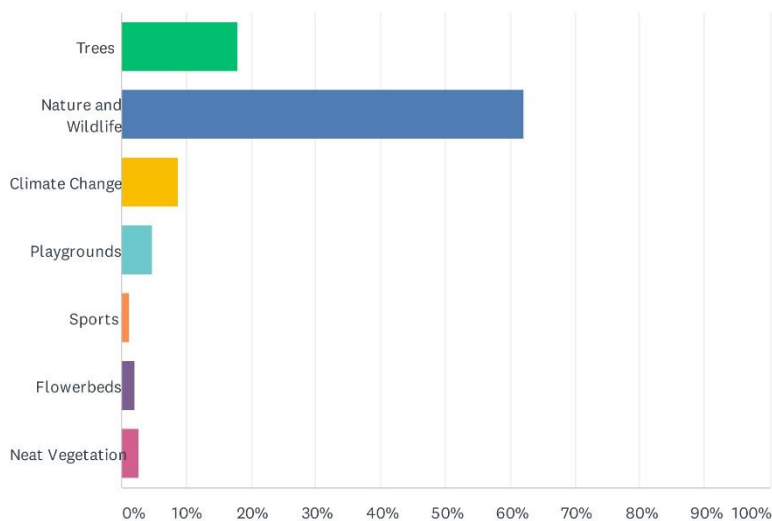


ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Strongly Agree	75.76%	250
Agree	20.91%	69
Neither Agree nor Disagree	2.42%	8
Disagree	0.61%	2
Strongly Disagree	0.30%	1
TOTAL		330

Question 8: What would you consider a top priority for your parks and open spaces?

Question 8 asked Rochford residents to consider what their main priorities were for the districts parks and open spaces out of a series of answer choices; trees, nature and wildlife, climate change, playgrounds, sports, flowerbeds or neat vegetation. 62.20% of residents considered that nature and wildlife was the most important priority, followed by trees 17.99%, climate change 8.84%, playgrounds 4.88%, flowerbeds 2.13%, neat vegetation 2.74% and sports 1.22%.

62.20%	Nature and Wildlife
17.99%	Trees
8.84%	Climate Change
4.88%	Playgrounds
2.13%	Flowerbeds
2.74%	Neat Vegetation
1.22%	Sports

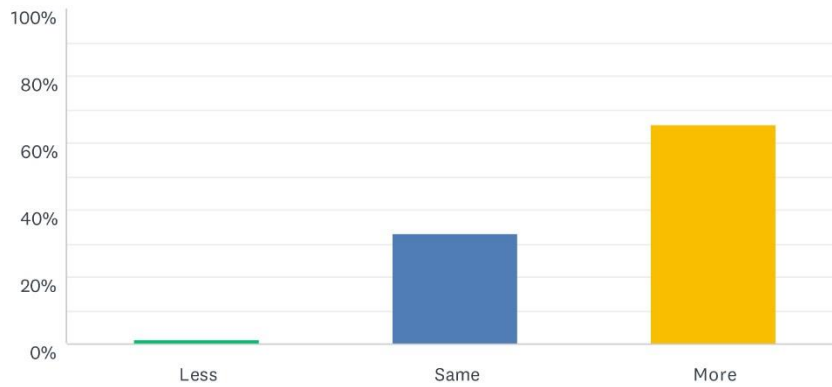


ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Trees	17.99%	59
Nature and Wildlife	62.20%	204
Climate Change	8.84%	29
Playgrounds	4.88%	16
Sports	1.22%	4
Flowerbeds	2.13%	7
Neat Vegetation	2.74%	9
TOTAL		328

Question 9: How much money should we be spending on the following features of open space: Litter?

Question 9 to 15 asked residents how much money should be spent on features and aspects of park maintenance, less, more or the same. Of the 329 responses, 65.65% or 216 said that more money should be spent on litter removal.

65.65% More
33.13% Same
1.22% Less

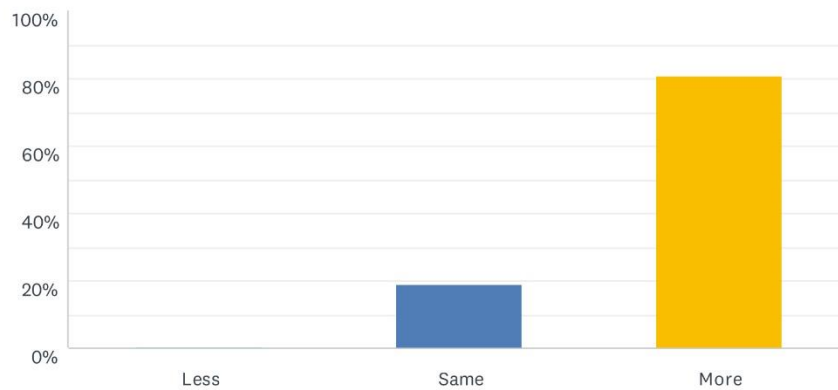


ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Less	1.22%	4
Same	33.13%	109
More	65.65%	216
TOTAL		329

Question 10: How much money should we be spending on the following features of open space: Trees?

Of the 327 responses to the levels of expenditure on trees 80.73% or 264 said that more money should be spent on trees.

80.73% **More,**
18.96% **Same**
0.31% **Less**

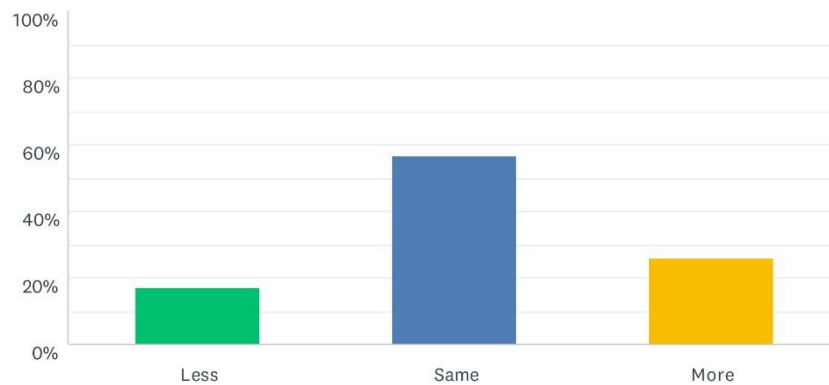


ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Less	0.31%	1
Same	18.96%	62
More	80.73%	264
TOTAL		327

Question 11: How much money should we be spending on the following features of open space: Playgrounds?

Of the 327 responses to the levels of expenditure on playgrounds, 56.57% or 185 said that the same amount of money should be spent.

56.57% **Same**
25.99% **More**
17.43% **Less**

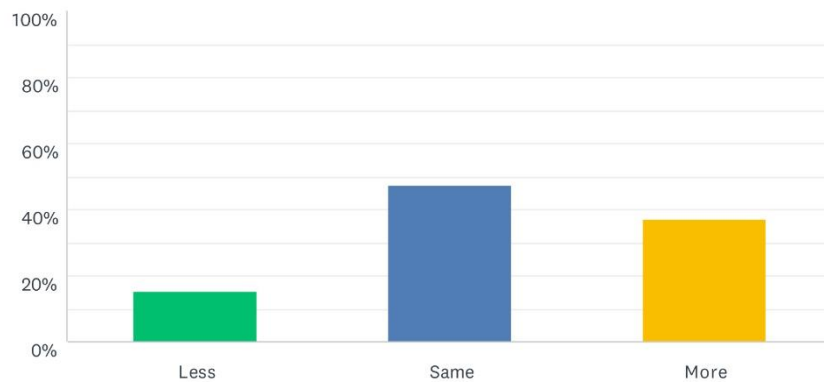


ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Less	17.43%	57
Same	56.57%	185
More	25.99%	85
TOTAL		327

Question 12: How much money should we be spending on the following features of open space: Shrubs and Gardens?

Of the 326 responses to the levels of expenditure on shrubs and gardens, 47.24% or 154 said that the same amount of money should be spent.

47.24% **Same**
37.42% **More**
15.34% **Less**

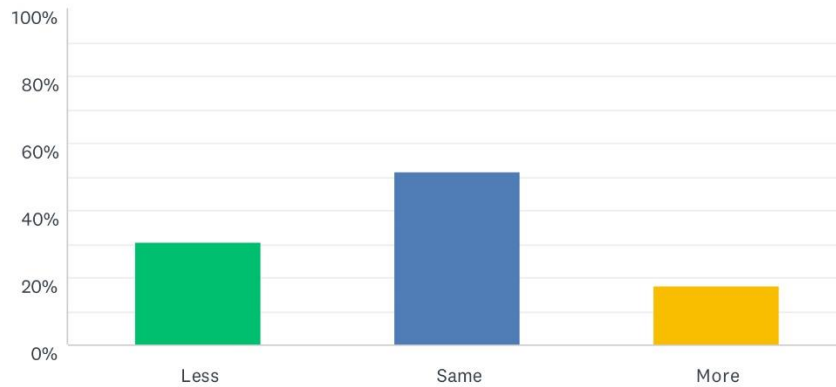


ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Less	15.34%	50
Same	47.24%	154
More	37.42%	122
TOTAL		326

Question 13: How much money should we be spending on the following features of open space: Grass Cutting?

Of the 328 responses to the levels of expenditure on grass cutting 51.83% or 170 said that the same amount of money should be spent.

51.83% **Same**
 30.49% Less
 17.68% More

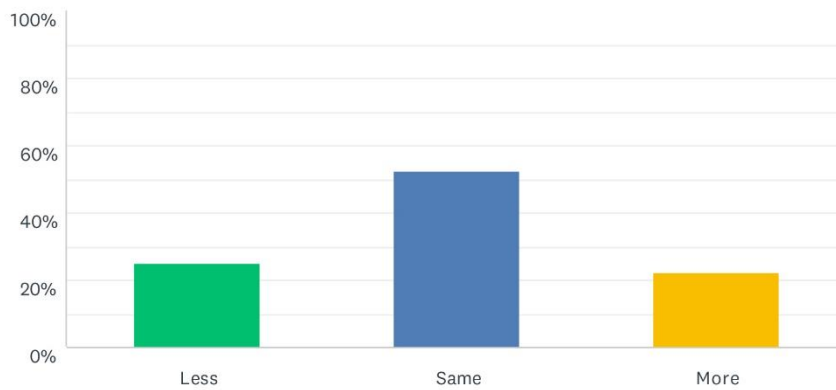


ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Less	30.49%	100
Same	51.83%	170
More	17.68%	58
TOTAL		328

Question 14: How much money should we be spending on the following features of open space: Sports?

Of the 326 responses to the levels of expenditure on sports, 52.45% or 171 said that the same amount of money should be spent.

52.45% **Same**
 25.15% Less
 22.39% More



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Less	25.15%	82
Same	52.45%	171
More	22.39%	73
TOTAL		326

Conclusion....

330 Rochford residents and stakeholders responded to the councils “Parks for Nature” consultation held over 4 weeks from the 17th May to the 14th June 2021. The council promoted the consultation and a download link to the questionnaire made available from the “Parks for Nature” page on the council website, key stakeholders were also sent a link to the questionnaire and encouraged to forward it to other interested parties. Residents from all the Wards across Rochford responded, the greatest return of questionnaire came from the Roche South Ward (43 responses) and least from Hullbridge Ward (7 responses).

The responses to the questions in the questionnaire indicate that the effects of climate change and wildlife and biodiversity are important priorities amongst residents and stakeholders in the district. Almost **65%** of the respondents consider climate change and its effects as a high priority topic. **92%** also consider that diversifying the districts parks and open spaces would have a positive effect on helping to control the effects of climate change and **88%** that the management of the district parks and open spaces should focus heavily on wildlife and biodiversity compared to **12%** that considered that “neat and tidy” spaces should be a priority.

80% also strongly agreed with the statement for utilising suitable land for rewilding and tree planting, **76%** would like to see more trees and **59%** more meadows in Rochford’s parks.

Residents and stakeholders emphasised the importance of nature conservation further by indicating that it was their top priority (**62%**) for their parks and open spaces, followed by trees (**18%**). Least priority were sports (**1%**) and flowerbeds (**2%**).

On the questions directed toward the councils expenditure on open spaces residents and stakeholders responded that the control of litter and trees should have more money spent on them, but that playgrounds, shrubs and gardens, grass cutting and sports should have the same amount spent on them.