

Brandhall Golf Course - Future Alternative Uses

Consultation Report (February 2020)

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1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 At the Cabinet Meeting on 30 October 2019, the following was resolved (Minute No.124/19);

- (1) That the Executive Director – Neighbourhoods, undertake all requisite steps necessary to ensure effective consultation with regards to the proposed closure and alternative uses of the Brandhall Golf Course site
- (2) following consultation, consider a more detailed report on future use of the site.

A six-week consultation period was then planned and carried out which started on 7 November and ended on 19 December 2019.

1.2 This was proposed as a result of a period of investigative work that was carried out as a result of a previous cabinet approval relating to the Built Facilities Strategy.

At the Cabinet meeting on 31 January 2018 the following recommendations were resolved (Key Decision Ref. No. SMBC16173, Minute No. 19/18);

1. That the adoption of Sandwell Sport & Leisure Built Facilities Strategy be approved;
2. That the Executive Director – Neighbourhoods develop further reports to Cabinet for the following priority opportunities:
 - Opportunity 8 (O8) – Secure the long-term sustainability of golf in Sandwell by supporting independent clubs, creating a golf development pathway, and identifying potential alternative uses for Brandhall Golf Course.
3. That Council be recommended to appoint Members to the Sandwell Sport & Leisure Built Facilities Strategy Members Steering Group.

Following the above approval officers appointed a consultant to carry out a Golf Needs Assessment and Golf Development Pathway (Appendix 15). The main outcomes of this investigative work found the following;

- The golf market in the UK has changed in recent years from a sport operating through club membership to one where pay and play is now more desirable. All golf facilities in Sandwell offer pay and play options for use.

- There is a high-level supply of golf courses in Sandwell and a low latent demand, leaving each facility competing for the same golfers and increasing the risk of golf courses becoming unsustainable.
- There is a total of 39 golf courses inside and outside the Borough boundary. This includes 7 facilities inside Sandwell and a further 32 golf facilities being within 20 minutes' drive from the borough boundary.
- Brandhall Golf Course is in poor condition and would need significant capital investment to bring it up to the required standard.
- The golf development pathway demonstrates that there is significant opportunity for Sandwell residents to participate in golf at all stages.
- It is a recommendation of the report that the Council explores further the long-term sustainability of Council-owned golf facilities as well how best to deliver the golf development pathway.
- It is also recommended within the report that a full options appraisal is undertaken on all Sandwell Council golf facilities. Therefore, there is an opportunity for Sandwell Council to consider the facilities that it currently supplies and the impact these have on the sustainability of golf in the Borough.
- The report concluded that, due to the high-level supply of golf courses in Sandwell and the low latent demand for participating in golf, there is an over-supply of golf facilities in Sandwell.
- Attendances at Brandhall Golf Course have reduced overall since 2013, see table below;

Year	Attendances
2013/2014	30,767
2014/2015	26,040
2015/2016	28,832
2016/2017	26,944
2017/2018	22,887
2018/2019	23,019

- The number of SLT golf members has reduced each year since 2016 as outlined in table 3 below. The expected number of members nationally for an 18-hole golf course is 480.

Year	SLT Golf Members
2016/2017	352
2017/2018	337
2018/2019	334
2019/2020	318

1.3 As a result of the findings outlined above the Council made proposals regarding the future use of the Brandhall Golf Course site. These proposals were consulted on as part of the consultation process.

2 CONSULTATION PROCESS

2.1 Rationale and Scope

To consult Sandwell residents on the Council's proposal to close Brandhall Golf Course and Club House and utilise the site to build a new school (replacement for Causeway Green Primary School), develop a new park and open space for the local community and provide much needed local housing. The Council provided three initial indicative options of how the proposed development options could be provided (Appendix 1).

Brandhall Golf Course is recognised as a 'boroughwide' facility, therefore the consultation process was open to anyone with an interest in the facility, including all residents of Sandwell. For reference, Sport England guidance states that the primary catchment area for a golf course is 20 minutes' drive time.

The consultation results include the views of all respondents, irrespective of their home location.

Consultation did not specifically target people outside of Sandwell as the views of local people were the primary concern for the Council. The proposed future developments have been identified to benefit Sandwell residents, therefore the views of people who live in Sandwell were prioritised.

Due to the locality of Brandhall Golf Course, responses to the survey have also been analysed and collated into a 'local residents' group. This is defined by those who live within the B68 postcode area to enable the Council to understand the view of those who live closest to the facility.

2.2 Elements of the Consultation Exercise

Stage 1: Communications – Press Release and Letters

The Cabinet Report - Brandhall Golf Course – Potential Options for Future Use (Appendix 2) was published online (via CMIS) in line with the Council's democratic processes on Tuesday 22 October 2019. The Cabinet report detailed the Council's proposal to consult on closing the facility and potentially developing a park, new school and housing on the site. A press release (Appendix 3) was issued to the local media and councillors to coincide with the Cabinet report. This press release was also uploaded to the Council's and Sandwell Leisure Trust's websites.

The Council was keen to ensure that the key stakeholders (i.e. local residents, staff, the golf club and Causeway Green Primary School) were given prior notice of the publication of these proposals. Council officers met with golf club committee representatives on Monday 21 October 2019 at 1pm. Club representatives were informed of the proposals and the process to collate the evidence which led to the proposals. Club representatives were provided with 300 letters (Appendix 4) from the Council to distribute to their members with details of the forthcoming Cabinet report and proposed consultation exercise. The same letter was sent to everybody with a golf course membership with Sandwell Leisure Trust, this included 318 members.

Letters (Appendix 5) were sent to 2,243 local residents prior to the Cabinet report (scheduled for 20 October 2019 Cabinet meeting) being published, informing them of the forthcoming Cabinet report and proposed consultation exercise. Appendix 6 shows the catchment area that was identified to receive letters. These were identified as the residents in the immediate vicinity of the golf course. 173 households (i.e. those closest to the golf course) received hand delivered letters from 6:30am on 21 October 2019 with others receiving posted letters.

Senior representatives at Causeway Green Primary School were also informed of the forthcoming press release and Cabinet Report in advance.

Stage 2: Launch of Consultation Period

Following Cabinet approval on 30 October 2019, the six-week consultation period commenced on 7 November 2019. A press release was issued to the local media and councillors which was also uploaded to the website (Appendix 7). The launch of the consultation was also promoted via the Council's Facebook and Twitter accounts, e-newsletter to residents and the staff message.

A further letter (Appendix 8 and Appendix 9) was sent to the golf club and local residents (the same mailing list as initial letters) on 5 November 2019 informing them further that the consultation process was to commence on 7 November 2019. Copies of the golf club letter were provided to the club representatives to distribute to golf course and club users upon their visits. Additional copies were provided throughout the process when required.

Stage 3: Live Consultation Phase - 7 November – 19 December 2019

Survey

A survey (Appendix 10) was developed to ascertain the following:

- Current usage levels of Brandhall Golf Course and Club House;
- Impact of potential closure;
- Views on importance of open space;
- Views on amount and 'make-up' of proposed open space;
- Importance of local school provision and proposed new school;
- Views on quality, type and requirement of new local housing; and
- Overall views on the Council's proposed three development options.

The survey was available online and was promoted via club and resident consultation letters. It was also promoted via social media and on the Council website homepage. Paper copies were made available at the 'drop-in' sessions and support was provided to complete the surveys if required. Attendees at 'drop-in' sessions were actively encouraged to complete a survey as part of the session.

A supply of paper copies was also provided to the golf club and were available from the club house and club shop throughout the process.

'Drop In' Sessions

The Council wanted to hold consultation sessions to specifically engage the local community in the consultation process. In total, three sessions were held (details below) as well as a further consultation session that was requested by Brandhall Golf Club members and committee.

Session 1: Tuesday 12 November, 10:00am-1:00pm at Brandhall Library, Tame Road, Oldbury, B68 0JT

Session 2: Wednesday 27 November, 1:00pm-4:00pm at Brandhall Library, Tame Road, Oldbury, B68 0JT

Session 3: Monday 16 December, 5:00pm-8:00pm at Brandhall Library, Tame Road, Oldbury, B68 0JT

Session 4 (additional session at the request of Brandhall Golf Club Representatives): Thursday 5 December, 7:00pm-8:30pm at Brandhall Golf Club

Three community sessions were held at a neutral venue as close as possible to the golf course (taking into account access and availability). Council officers from relevant service areas (Planning, Education, Parks and Sport & Leisure) were present at each of the sessions to engage with residents on a one-to-one basis or in small groups. Local residents could attend at any time within the session on an informal basis to ask questions, raise any concerns and have the opportunity to gain support with completing the survey. Paper copies of the survey were also made available for residents to take away and return to the Council at a later date.

Enquiry forms (Appendix 11) were also provided to capture comments and specific enquiries that were later followed up and responded to, where required. Council officers at the sessions utilised these forms to capture comments and enquiries as part of informal conversations.

For sessions two and three, attendees were asked to complete a 'sign-in' sheet (Appendix 12) on arrival, providing information to enable us to understand who attended and their interest in the golf course. This was not carried out at the first session as it was anticipated that Council officers would be able to collect this information as part of the individual enquiry forms. However, due to the large number of attendees at the first session this was not possible; therefore, an alternative approach of signing in was implemented for following sessions.

A further session was delivered, at the request of Brandhall Golf Club representatives. This took place at Brandhall Golf Club and was attended by club members and local residents. This was delivered as a 'Question & Answer' format with questions being answered by Council officers representing the relevant service areas (Planning, Education, Parks and Sport & Leisure). The Chief Executive Officer of Sandwell Leisure Trust was also present at the club session.

Information was displayed at each of the sessions for attendees. This included key information from the related cabinet report, frequently asked questions (FAQs) and visuals of the three conceptual redevelopment options.

General Enquiries

The Council encouraged and invited written (including email) enquiries. An email address was set up specifically for the consultation period, brandhall_consultation@sandwell.gov.uk. This was promoted within the press release, letters, social media and the Council website. All enquiries to the Council, via the email address or direct to Council representatives, were logged via an 'Enquiry Tracker' (Appendix 13) and responded to at the earliest opportunity. A team member from Sport and Leisure was allocated responsibility for monitoring incoming enquiries for the duration of the consultation period. Responses were collated and checked with relevant colleagues to ensure detailed and robust responses were provided.

A list of questions and answers were added to the Council's website during the consultation, to help answer frequently asked questions (Appendix 14).

Press and Social Media

Press enquiries were responded to by the Council's Communications Team. Social media comments and queries were also monitored by the Communications Team and responded to as necessary. The Communications Team shared relevant links and updates on both the Council's Twitter and Facebook pages.

Stage 4: Consultation Analysis – methodology

Following the completion of the six-week consultation period, all feedback has been collated. Including the following:

Survey

A total of 712 surveys were completed, either online or handwritten. All responses have been tallied to provide overall totals and percentages for each question. A total of 3,473 specific comments were received in the 'open sections' of the survey. Each one of these has been logged and categorised. All handwritten and returned copies of the survey have been manually inputted and, therefore, included in the analysis.

'Drop In' Sessions

Completed 'sign-in' sheets have been collated to provide an overview of attendees. All comments and questions recorded on Enquiry Forms have also been logged, listed and categorised.

General Enquiries

All emails, letters and Freedom of Information requests were recorded on an 'Enquiry Tracker'. These have been individually reviewed and overarching themes and sub themes have been developed.

Press and Social Media

Press coverage and social media comments have been reviewed and categorised into key themes.

3 CONSULTATION FINDINGS

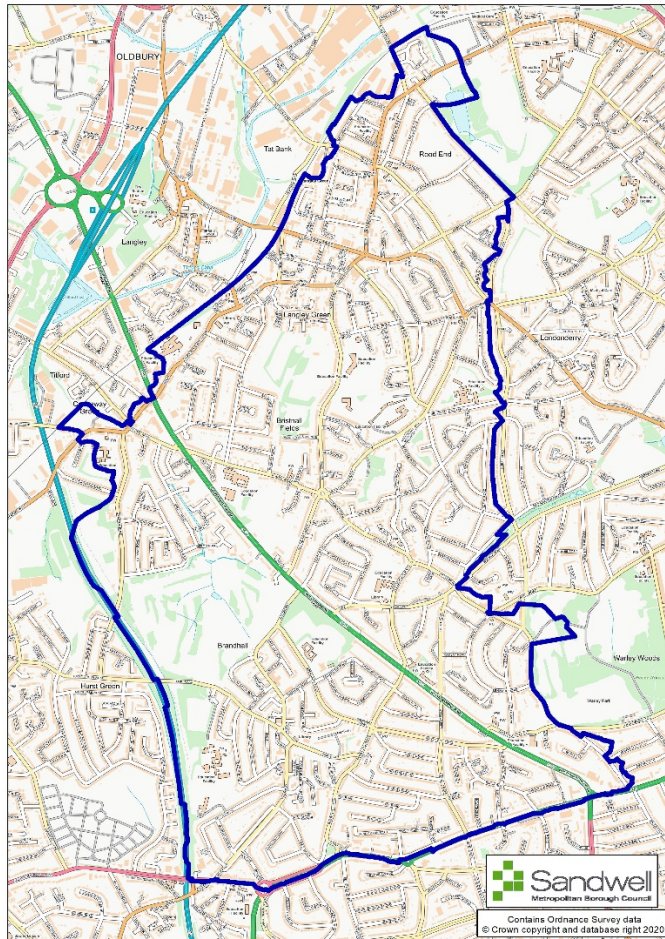
3.1 Engagement;

Those residents most local to the golf course were prioritised when promoting the consultation. The catchment area below was identified to form a mailing list. This includes 2,243 households that were written to twice to promote the consultation process - once before the launch of the consultation and once on the day that it went live. These households include 5,107* individual residents.



* Data Source: Office for National Statistics, Mid-Year Estimates 2018 LSOAs

Despite directly promoting to 2,243 households, as well as the wider Sandwell community, in total 712 people completed the consultation survey, all of which live in Sandwell. 358 of survey respondents were from the B68 postcode area, including the 'engagement catchment area'.



The consultation was promoted twice by the Council via the Council’s Facebook page, reaching over 28,000 people with a second post receiving 3,500 engagements. The Council made five Tweets promoting the consultation with a mean average reach of 3187 people per Tweet.

Overall, while promoting the consultation process as outlined above, the Council reached circa 35,000 people.

3.2 Overall feedback from those who engaged in the consultation presented a balanced view about the closure of Brandhall Golf Course and Club House and a largely positive view about the proposed development options.

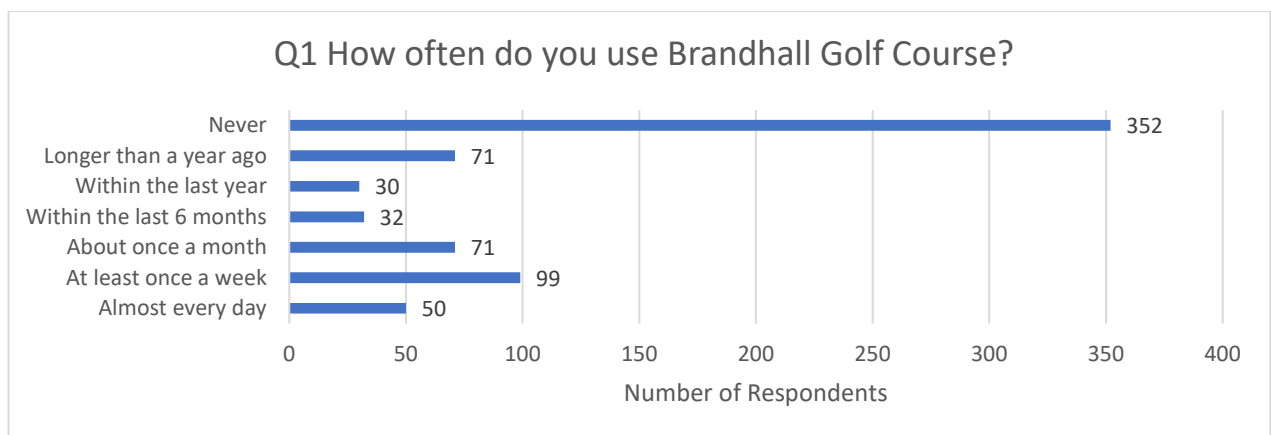


Figure 1: Frequency of usage of Brandhall Golf Course

Figure 1 above shows that the majority of survey respondents never or rarely use Brandhall Golf Course. This is also evident when just looking at responses from those who live in the B68 postcode area. 56.4% of those who live in the B68 area never use the facility. Please note, 705 out of 712 respondents answered this question. Seven respondents chose not to answer Question 1.

18 of the 50 respondents who use Brandhall Golf Course 'Almost every day', as shown in Figure 1 above, stated that this was to play golf, and 74 of the 99 respondents who use Brandhall Golf Course 'At least once a week' stated that this was to play golf.

60% of the members of Brandhall Golf Course are from outside of Sandwell which provides some explanation to the responses received from local people, i.e. there is currently low usage by Sandwell residents, therefore low anticipated impact to local residents should it close.

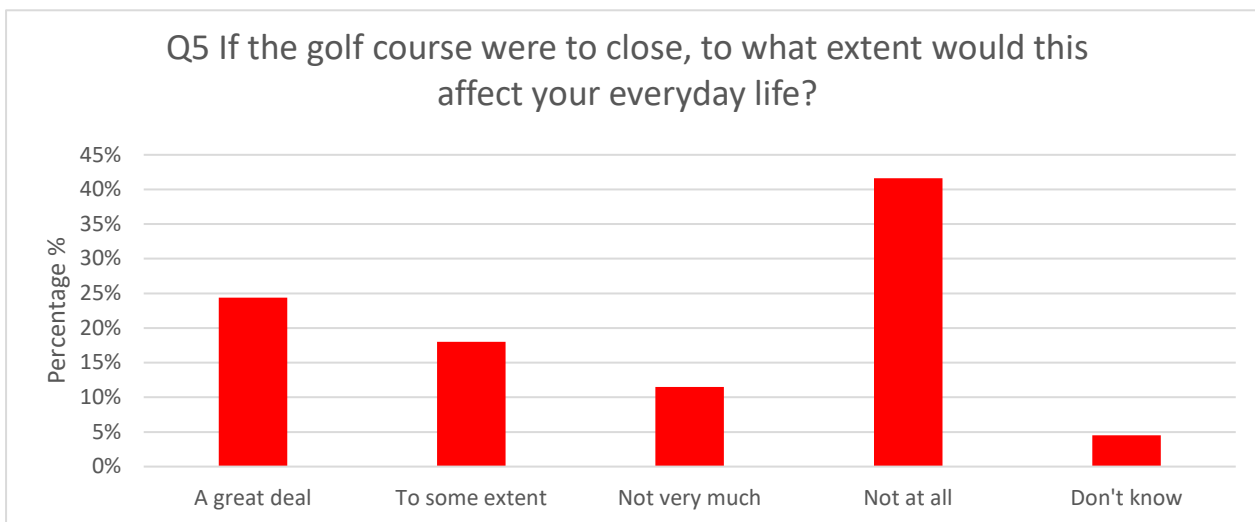


Figure 2: Potential impact of closure (all respondents)

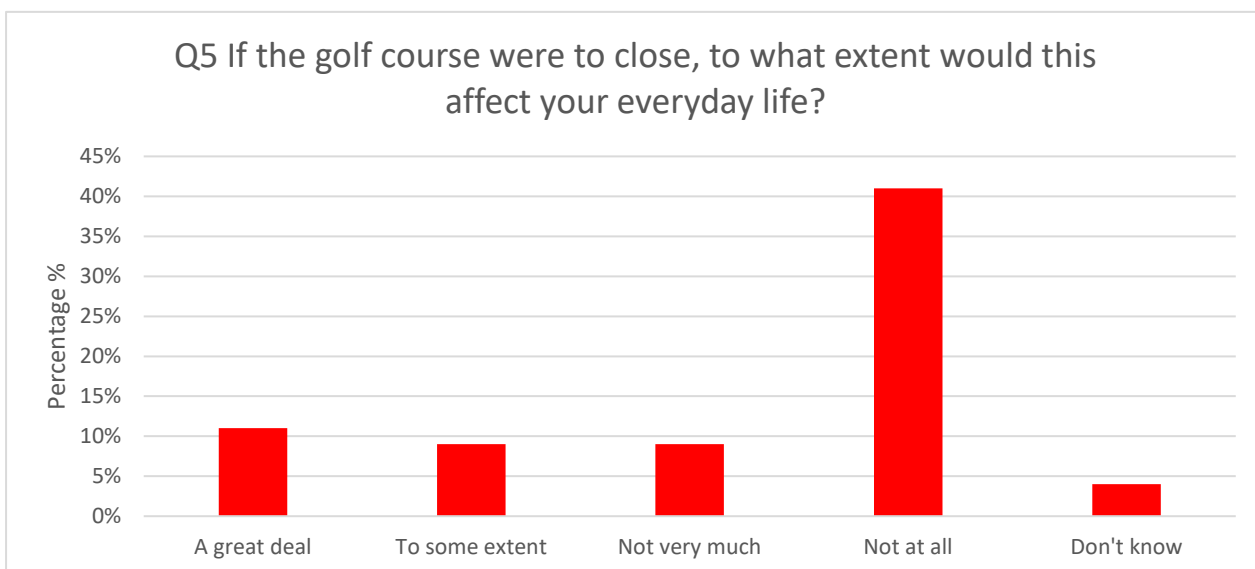


Figure 3: Potential impact of closure (local residents only – excluding golfers)

Figure 2 and 3 above show the extent to which respondents felt they would be affected should the facility close. Figure 2 presents the responses of all respondents with most (294 respondents) stating that they would not be affected at all. Many of those who stated they would be affected 'a great deal' were golf course users.

When considering the views of people who do not play golf at Brandhall Golf Course, just 11% or 70 respondents stated that they would be affected 'a great deal'. All of these respondents stated that they currently use the golf course for 'physical activity' or 'to walk the dog'. Both of these activities could continue under the Council's proposed development which includes a significant new local park and open space. There are two existing 'rights of way' across the course which would be retained should a development take place. The position of these may need to be adjusted but access would be retained.

3.3 The survey also asked respondents to state how they would be affected if they had said they would be. Figure 4 shows a summary of these responses.

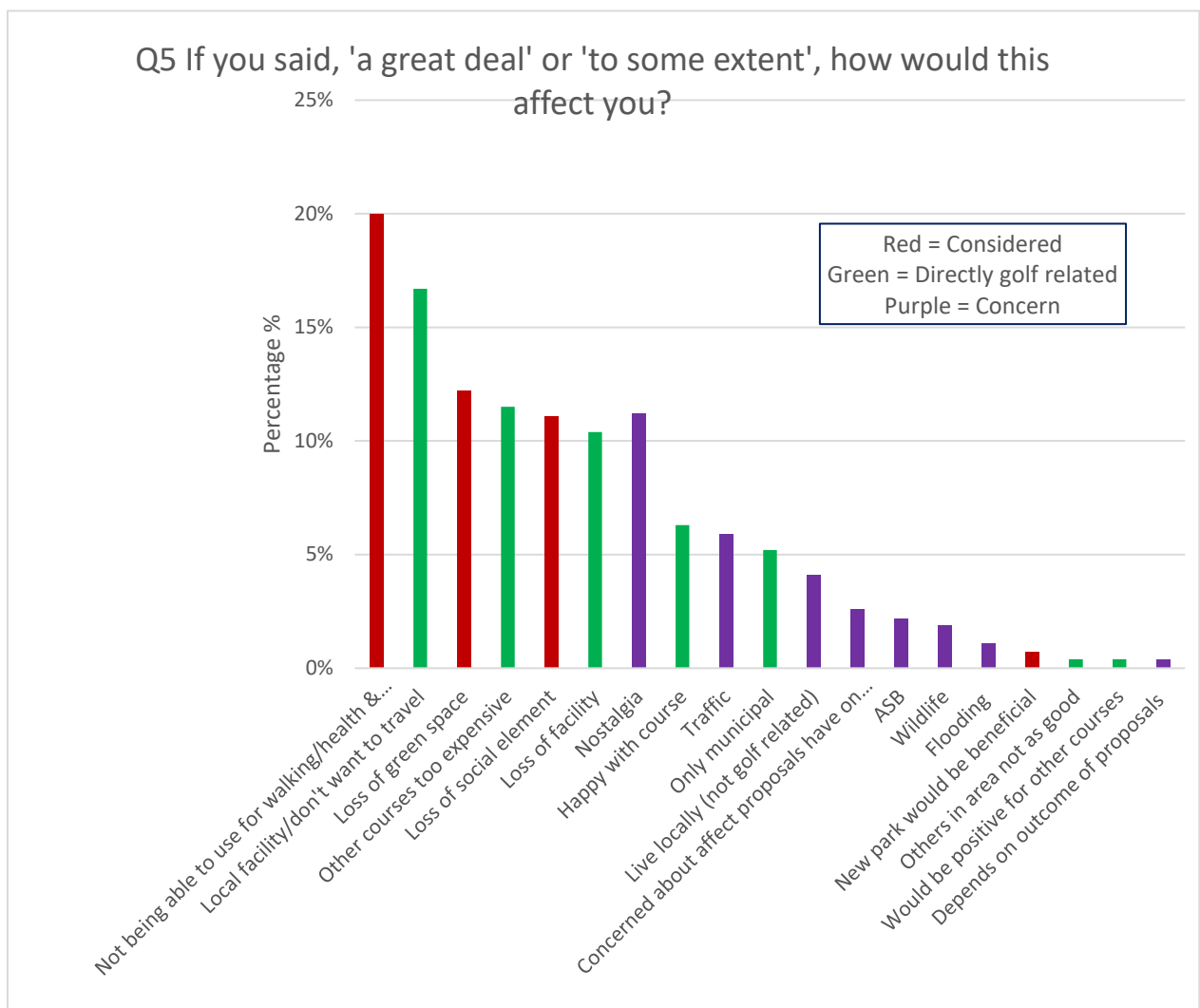


Figure 4: Summary of responses showing how respondents would be affected by closure of the golf course

The responses highlighted in green are those which relate directly to the potential loss of the golf provision. As stated within the Golf Needs Assessment Report (appendix 15) there are a further 38 golf facilities within a 20-minute drive of Sandwell. This includes 26 18-hole and eight 9-hole golf courses, with the report concluding that there is an oversupply of golf facilities in the local area. Within Sandwell, there are three 18-hole and two 9-hole courses all of which offer 'pay-and-play' options.

The responses highlighted in purple are those that can be regarded as 'concerns'. It is not yet known whether these issues would come to fruition. Should the Council proceed with a development on this site, all of the appropriate site surveys and assessments would be carried out to ensure mitigation of any potential issues.

The responses highlighted in red are those that the Council have already considered in terms of the amenities that the proposed future development would provide. In particular, the provision of a new local park would convert the golf course from restricted open to accessible open space, a net gain for the area.

3.4 The survey asked how important people felt it was to have a local park, good educational facilities and good quality local housing. Most respondents stated that this was important. This was also consistent with the views of those respondents that live in the B68 postcode area (open space 89.5%, education 77% and housing 63.8%)

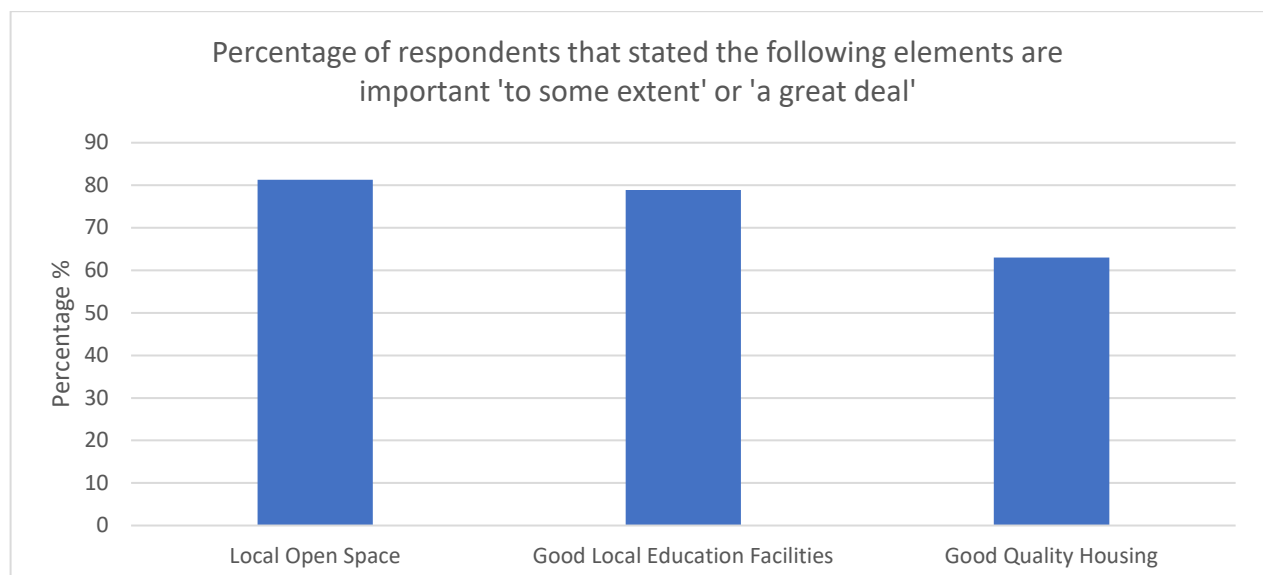


Figure 5: Percentage of respondents that stated that local open space, good educational facilities and good quality housing are important 'to some extent' or 'a great deal'.

3.5 There was a very strong reaction (objection) to proposals from some golfers and local residents (i.e. those who live in the immediate vicinity to the golf course). This strength of feeling was predominantly expressed 'face-to-face' at the 'drop in' sessions and at the club session.

The main concerns of this group were captured at the 'drop in' sessions and via the general enquiries that were received. In total, 37 written (email or letters) were received. The main queries and comments from these enquiries included;

- Environmental concerns, i.e. potential loss of trees and perceived loss of green space. Master planning for the site would ensure that there would be no loss of trees overall.
- Health concerns were also raised regarding the proposed proximity of the school to the motorway and overhead power cables. The location of the school would be subject to a full environmental assessment and has not yet been agreed.
- Some people raised concerns regarding the proposals for the change of use rather than keeping the golf course open. The survey (appendix 10) asks a number of open questions and provided a number of opportunities to make open comments and express their views.
- The potential loss of the social facility (club house) was also raised. Consideration is being given to the re-provision of a community facility within the proposed development.
- Concerns about an increased flood risk as a result of a housing development. Should a development proceed then a full flood risk assessment would be carried out.
- Concerns about increased traffic in the local area as a result of the proposed development. Again, a full traffic assessment would form part of a master plan.
- A new local park would benefit the local community and environment.
- The proposed development, as a whole, would be positive for the local area.
- A number of comments were received stating that new housing is needed in the local area.
- There were also comments made regarding the subsidy that the Council currently provides for the operation of the facility, that the level of subsidy is not justified.

Despite the issues raised, the majority of people felt that each of the elements of the Council's proposals are important. Around 80% of respondents felt that local open space and good educational facilities are important. Over 60% felt that good quality housing is important. This is outlined in Figure 5 above.

3.6 Some golfers and local residents reported anecdotally that the social element of the golf course (i.e. the club house) was of great importance to local people. This was also captured via general enquiries that were received. However, this was not reflected in the responses received via the survey, which is illustrated in the graph below.

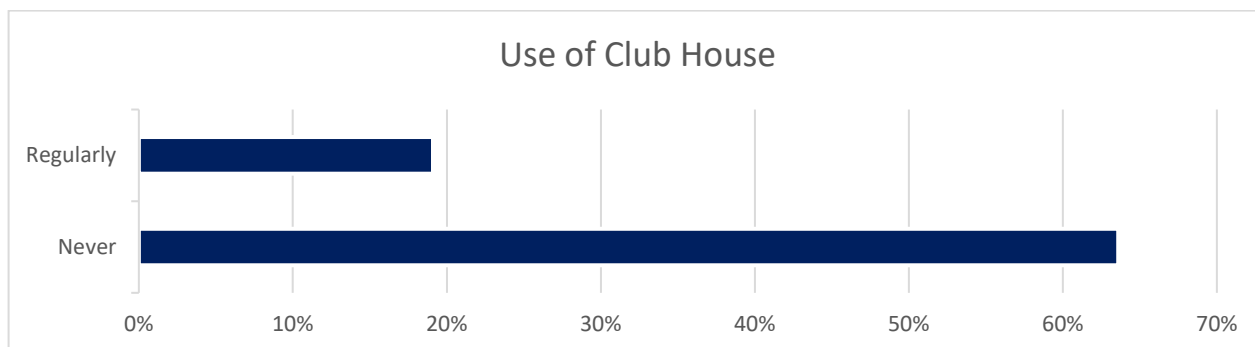


Figure 6: Use of club house for social activities (all respondents)

Further to this, 69.6% (250) of respondents who live within the B68 postcode never use the club house. 13.4% (48) of the 359 respondents use the club house 'regularly' (i.e. 'about once a month', 'about once a week' or 'almost every day'). However, as outlined above, consideration will be given to the re-provision of a social facility for the local community as part of future developments should the golf course close.

- 3.7 The survey provided respondents the opportunity to provide any further comments. The table below shows a summary of the comments made and how many respondents made them. The most common comment related to keeping the golf course open. However, this accounted for just 13.5% of all respondents. 5.5% of the 13.5% were from the B68 postcode.

Table 1: Further comments

Q13 - Further comments		
Keep BGC	96	13.5%
Keep green space/keep more green space	47	6.6%
Happy to see alternative proposals for BGC	46	6.5%
traffic/parking/congestion/infrastructure issues	40	5.6%
Build on brownfield or alternative sites	36	5%
Consider environment/wildlife/trees in alternative use	34	4.8%
Change to 9 hole/make improvements/improve advertising	32	4.5%
Don't need more houses	30	4.2%
'Done deal'/unhappy with survey	27	3.8%
Nostalgia	23	3.2%
Questioning Golf Report/subsidy/costs to improve	18	2.5%
Loss of health benefits with loss of BGC	18	2.5%
Agree with new school build	15	2.1%
New school in incorrect location	13	1.8%
Flooding	13	1.8%
Disagree with new school build	10	1.4%
Need council/affordable/social houses	7	1%
Criticism of how currently run and current operator	6	0.8%
Need houses	5	0.7%
Can't afford private housing	4	0.6%
Enough parks already	2	0.3%

3.8 The Council's proposed future development options were included in the survey and respondents were asked to state which option they preferred.



The majority of respondents stated that they preferred the option with the largest park and fewest houses. A breakdown is shown below;

- Option 1: 40 respondents (7.9%)
- Option 2: 40 respondents (7.9%)

- Option 3: 428 respondents (84.3%)

4 Summary

- 4.1 The strongest objections to the Council's proposals were expressed by some golfers and local residents. This was mainly captured at face-to-face sessions and via general written enquiries. Overall, the majority of respondents expressed a more balanced view regarding the potential closure and proposed development options.

The overall analysis of the survey, taking into account all responses regardless of respondents' postcode location, reflected very similarly when analysing responses of local residents. Overall those with B68 postcode had similar views to those from other areas of Sandwell.

The consultation exercise sought to explore the current usage of the facility and the impact on local people should it close. The consultation findings show that the majority of people engaged in the consultation never or rarely use the facility and around half of survey respondents would not be affected by closure.

The consultation exercise also sought to capture what local people felt was important to their local community. Most survey respondents felt that the amenities that the Council are proposing are important, with most respondents opting for Option 3 of the development proposals. However, a number of golf club members and local residents that attended the 'drop in' sessions made their feelings clear that they wanted to golf course to remain.

Overall, the consultation findings supported the work carried out previously (i.e. that the facility is underused by Sandwell residents in general). In particular, the majority of local residents do not use the facility and would not be affected if it closed.

Many of the concerns raised can be mitigated through the delivery of the Council's proposals and careful consideration would be given to addressing these concerns. As outlined in Section 2, proactive measures were taken to promote the consultation process to as many residents as possible.

Over 2,000 households (5,107 people) were contacted to participate in the consultation. The consultation was promoted twice by the Council via the Council's Facebook page, reaching over 28,000 people with a second post receiving 3,500 engagements. The Council made five Tweets promoting the consultation with a mean average reach of 3187 people per Tweet.

Overall, while promoting the consultation process as outlined above, the Council reached circa 35,000 people. Despite this level of engagement, just 712 residents completed the survey, an estimated 100 people attended the 'drop in' sessions, and 37 people wrote directly to us to express their views.

5 Next Steps and Considerations

- 5.1 Consultation findings to be presented to the Safer Neighbourhoods and Active Communities Scrutiny Board on 27 February 2020. The scrutiny board will then make recommendations for Cabinet to consider.
- 5.2 Further site feasibility work is required and a full site investigation, including ecological surveys, topographical survey, traffic assessments and flood risk assessments. This will enable the development of a master plan for the site.