

Phear Park Exmouth play area upgrades

Survey report

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1. Summary

A public survey was launched to gather feedback on the future of play equipment at Phear Park, Exmouth. The existing equipment is recognised as being in need of upgrading, and residents were invited to share their ideas and priorities for improvements. Respondents were encouraged to suggest the types of equipment and features they would like to see included in the project. The survey remained open until 5pm on 24 September, providing the community with an opportunity to help shape the design and focus of future play provision within the park.

2. Survey goals and methodology

The purpose of this survey was to gather local views on the future of play provision at Phear Park, Exmouth. Specifically, the consultation aimed to:

- Understand how residents currently use the play area and which equipment is most valued.

- Identify priorities for improvement and the types of new play features or facilities the community would like to see included.
- Ensure that the design of any future upgrade reflects the needs and preferences of local families, children and park users.

The survey was hosted online via the East Devon District Council's Commonplace engagement platform. It was open to the public from [insert launch date] until 5pm on 24 September. Promotion took place through the Council's website, social media channels, and local community networks to encourage wide participation. Respondents were invited to answer a short series of questions about their current use of the park, preferred equipment types, and suggestions for future improvements. The consultation was open to all residents, with particular encouragement for parents, carers, and children who regularly use the play area. All responses were collected anonymously and analysed to identify common themes, priorities, and preferred features to help guide the next stage of project planning.

3. Survey process

The survey was hosted on the online platform commonplace and promoted through multiple channels to ensure as many responses as possible.

- Direct commonplace email to all on the mailing list
- Social media posts on the Council's platforms
- In the community engagement and residents newsletter

The survey opened on the 20 August and closed on 24 September. After the closing date, responses were compiled and analysed to identify common patterns and key areas of concern.

4. Data analysis

The survey received 330 contributions from the public over the survey period.

1. How do you / your child feel about the current play park?

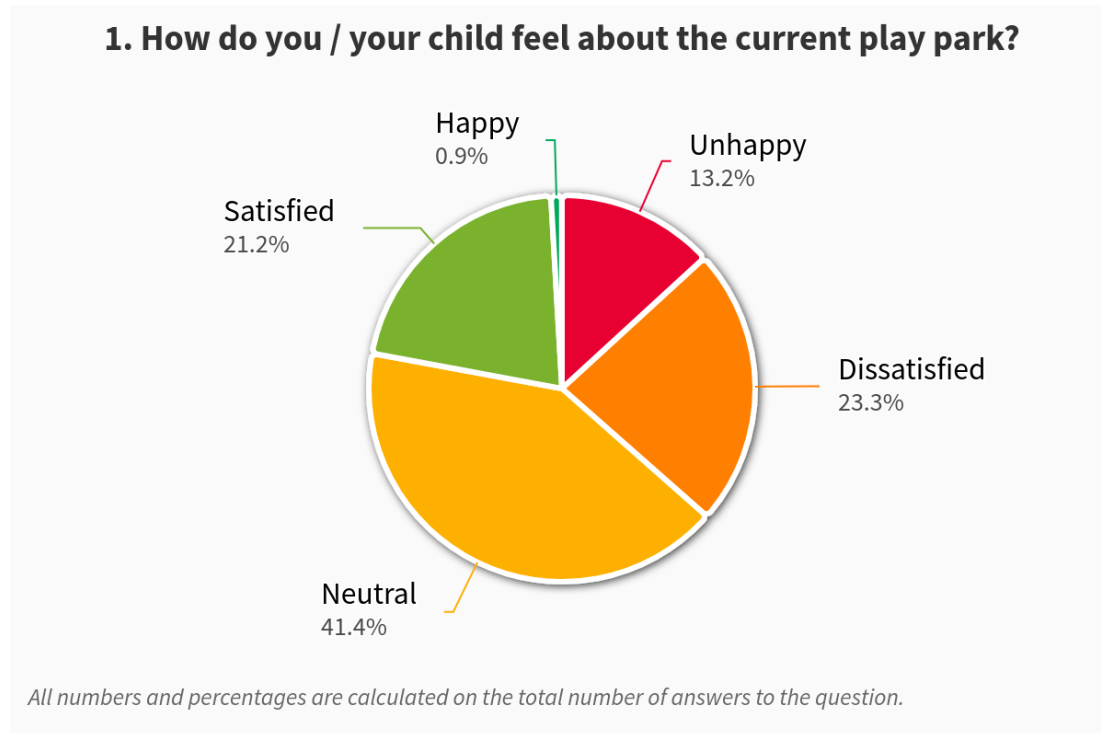


Figure 1: Public opinions on how they felt about the play park.

We received 326 contributions to this question.

Results show a neutral feeling on the park with 41.4% responding this way

There is an overall dissatisfaction compared with satisfaction of the park with 26.5% being dissatisfied or unhappy.

2. If you've / your child has never visited the play park please give details as to why

1. Equipment condition and safety concerns

Many respondents described the existing play area as outdated, poorly maintained and in need of refurbishment, with some equipment reportedly unchanged for decades. Safety issues were frequently raised, including rusting or broken structures, uneven surfacing, and general cleanliness. Several participants expressed concerns about antisocial behaviour, vandalism and graffiti, which contribute to perceptions that the site is unsafe for children.

2. Limited provision for different age groups and abilities

A significant number of comments highlighted a lack of suitable equipment for toddlers and younger children, particularly the absence of baby swings and low-level play features. Others noted that the site offers insufficient challenge or variety for older children, leading to short visits or a preference for other local parks. Respondents also pointed out that the

current layout is not inclusive, with no accessible or adapted play options for children with disabilities or limited mobility.

3. Clear support for modernisation and improved facilities

There was strong support for refurbishment and investment in new, engaging equipment, especially modern climbing frames, slides and monkey bars suitable for ages 5–11. Many residents suggested introducing a splash pad or imaginative natural play features to increase the park’s appeal and align it with newer facilities elsewhere. Overall, respondents expressed optimism about the proposed improvements, welcoming the opportunity to make Phear Park a safer, cleaner and more stimulating space for all age groups.

3. Please select the types of play that are most important to you / your child?

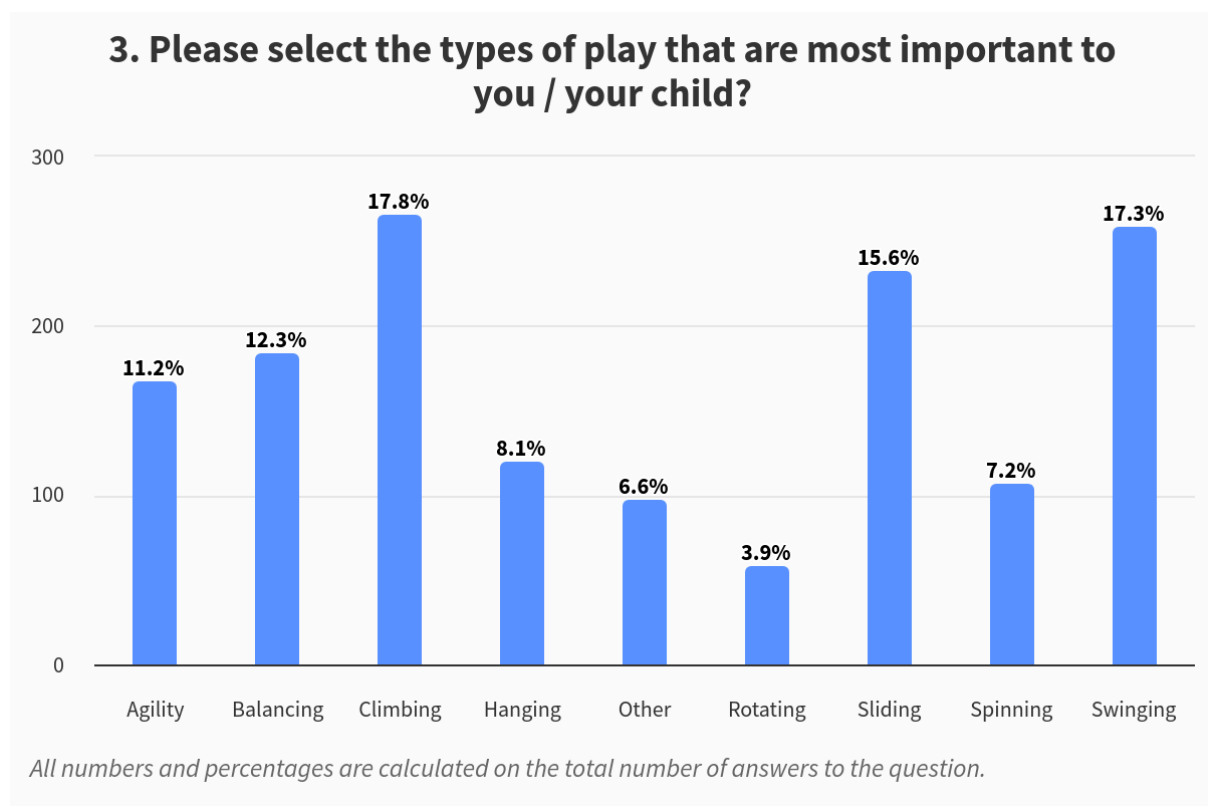


Figure two: Public opinion on what type of play is most important to them or their child.

Climbing and swinging were the most popular type of play followed by sliding.

The least popular was rotating followed by spinning.

Respondents that selected other showed a very strong support for water-based play features, particularly a splash park or splash pad, which many described as something Exmouth currently lacks. There was also frequent mention of bouncing and zip-line activities, alongside requests for trampolines, monkey bars, sensory and accessible equipment, and facilities suitable for younger children and those with additional needs.

4. Please order the activities you / your child most want included in the upgraded play area?

Votes by Activity (Ranked 1-8 Preferences)

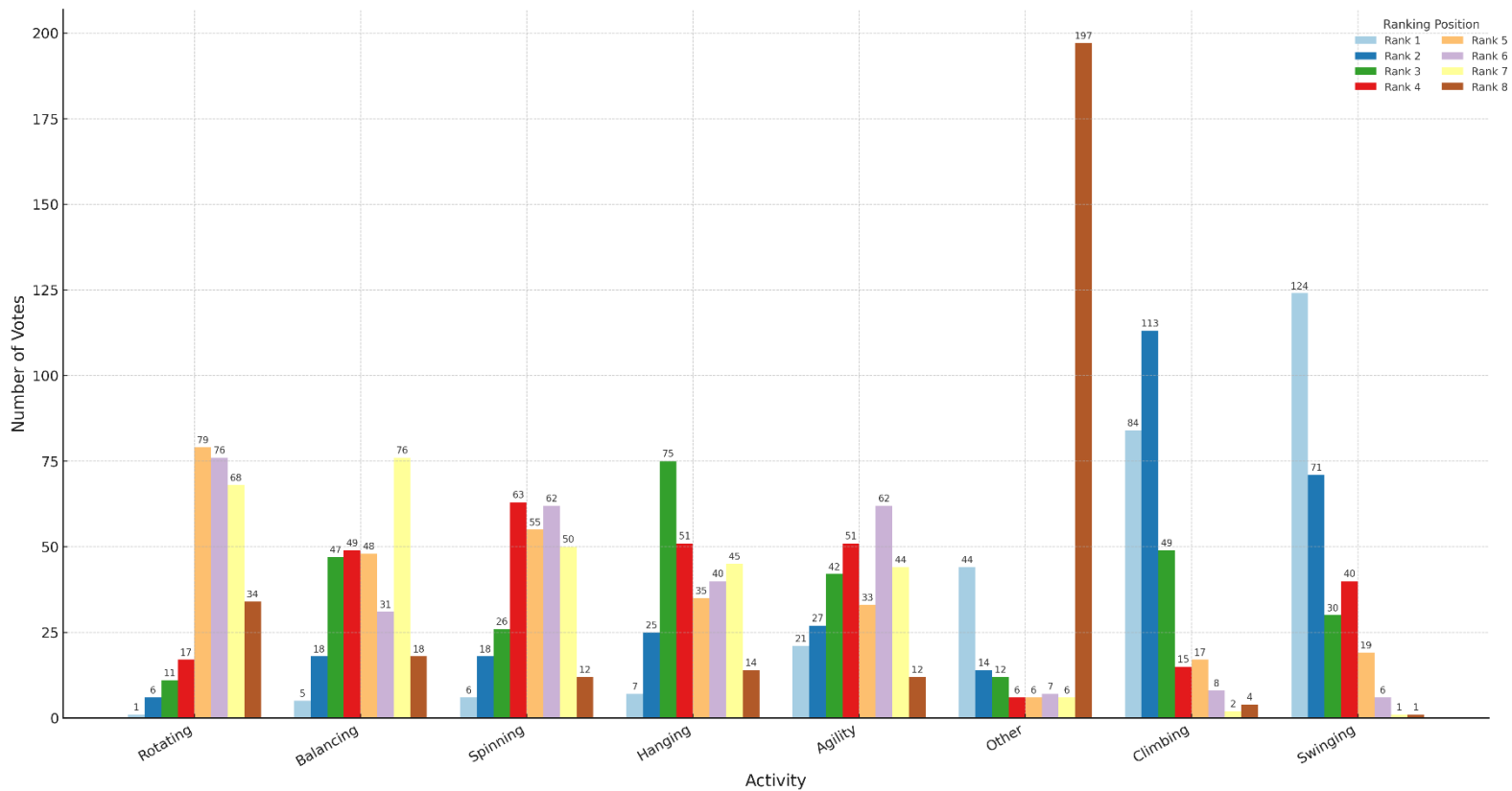


Figure three: Public opinion on what type of play activity they or their child most want to be included in the upgraded play area.

The ranking data shows clear preferences for which activities respondents most want included in the upgraded play area. Swinging was by far the most popular first choice (124 votes), followed by climbing (84) — confirming that physically engaging play features are the highest priority for most users. Climbing also received the strongest second-place ranking (113), reinforcing its appeal as an essential core activity.

Hanging and balancing scored moderately across middle rankings (categories 3–6), suggesting they are valued as supporting activities rather than headline features. Spinning and rotating elements rose in frequency from the middle to lower rankings (categories 5–7), indicating these are less preferred but still desirable for variety and challenge. Agility maintained a steady but mid-range presence throughout. Notably, “Other” activities received a very high number of eighth-place rankings (197), showing that alternative or unspecified play options are largely considered lowest priority. Overall, the data indicates that residents place the greatest importance on swinging and climbing equipment, while rotational and “other” play features are viewed as much less essential.

Respondents that selected other showed a strong emphasis and desire for water-based play, particularly splash pads, splash zones and water play areas, which many see as a much-needed feature for Exmouth. There was also repeated mention of slides, trampolines and bouncing equipment, along with zip lines, pump tracks and inclusive features to create a more engaging and accessible play environment for all ages.

5. Themed play areas can make play more fun and memorable. For example, Queens Drive has a dinosaur theme and Carter Avenue has a ship with matching surfacing. If Phear Park were to have a theme, what would like it to be?

1. Strong preference for natural and woodland-inspired themes

The majority of respondents favoured woodland, forest, or nature-based designs that reflect Phear Park's setting, trees and wildlife. Many suggested incorporating animals, insects, and local habitats (e.g. squirrels, birds, ponds, trees) to connect the play area with its surroundings. Comments highlighted support for sustainable, natural materials and earthy tones rather than bright, artificial colours.

2. High interest in sea, water and adventure themes

A significant number supported seaside or ocean-themed play, linking to Exmouth's coastal identity. Several requested splash zones or water play features as part of a wider "sea life" or "beach" theme. Others preferred adventure or exploration concepts — such as ninja, jungle, castle or pirate styles — to make play more active and imaginative.

3. Mixed views on the need for a theme at all

Some respondents felt a theme is unnecessary, suggesting the focus should be on quality, safety and inclusivity of equipment instead. A few felt that overly themed designs could limit imagination or date quickly. Several proposed that the park should prioritise equipment suitable for all ages and abilities rather than investing heavily in decorative theming.

5. Key findings

- The play area is well located and valued by local families but widely seen as outdated, unsafe in parts and lacking variety for different age groups.
- Parents want the space to cater for all abilities, from babies to older children, with inclusive, sensory and accessible equipment.
- Water play is the single most requested new feature, followed by trampolines, zip lines and more challenging climbing equipment.
- Poor drainage and muddy conditions limit year-round use and make the park less appealing after wet weather.
- There is a strong desire for better seating, picnic areas, dog-free zones and safer gated access.

- Most residents prefer natural or woodland-inspired themes that fit the surroundings, rather than bold decorative concepts.

6. Recommendations

- **Renew and modernise equipment to provide a mix of play experiences for toddlers, primary-aged children and older users, including sensory and inclusive elements.**

This will be included in the specification. Suppliers who include this detail will score more favourably during evaluation of their submissions.

- **Install a splash pad or water play feature to create a unique attraction within Exmouth and meet clear local demand. We recognise how much value this type of facility can provide but feel that Phear Park is not the best location to deliver it. Here's why:**

We think it's important for this type of facility to have a building nearby for users to have access to hot showers and dedicated changing facilities. The closest area for people to change/dry themselves is ~200m away and is a public convenience with no showers or dedicated changing area.

The closest water supply is ~200m away. Providing this would be extremely expensive, disruptive to the park and a future maintenance liability.

The closest parking facility is ~200m away.

Surface water drainage is already an issue. Whilst we're happy to improve this for the refurbished play area, adding a water feature will require a higher specification/larger system to be installed. The cost of this outweighs the value of providing the facility. Alternatives such as a closed circuit/recycled water system are also very expensive to install and require separate/independent inspections and safety checks which would incur a perpetual maintenance cost into the future.

The idea of a water feature seems attractive and inviting but the reality is that it would only be used during the peak of the summer months and provide little value for the remaining 9 months of the year.

We will happily consider this request when upgrading other areas to see if those locations and the surrounding infrastructure are more suitable.

- **Upgrade surfacing and drainage to improve safety, reduce mud and allow all-season use.**

This request will be included in the specification to potential suppliers, and their response will be evaluated accordingly.

- **Enhance the layout and amenities by adding seating, picnic spaces, clear sightlines and gated entrances for safety and supervision.**

An excellent and pertinent request. It will be included in the specification to potential suppliers, and their response will be evaluated accordingly. We can confirm that yellow self-closing gated entrances and additional seating will be included in the revised design.

- **Adopt a natural, woodland or parkland theme that reflects the character of Phear Park and blends into its setting.**

This is another excellent request which will be included in the specification to potential suppliers, and their response will be evaluated accordingly.

- **Explore options for a small pump track or balance-bike loop to complement the existing skate park and encourage active outdoor play.**

EDDC officers have been working with Exmouth TC to deliver a prioritised list of facilities via S106 contributions (funding received from local development). We're pleased to report that funding has been allocated to provide a pump track at Phear Park. This will be delivered along with the play area upgrade.

7. Next steps

We will carry out a procurement exercise with potential suppliers. Submissions will be received in the Spring of 2026 which will be evaluated to identify our preferred supplier. We will then enter a formal contract and raise an order to get the manufacturing process underway. Delivery of the scheme is estimated to be during Summer 2026, but we will update you again as the scheme progresses.