

REPORT ON THE FINDINGS OF THE LEECHWELL GARDEN POOL DESIGN EVENT, TOTNES, JUNE 2011.

Dr Gill Dunne (July 2011)

BACKGROUND. The one day Design Event hosted by the Leechwell Garden Pool Group (part of the Leechwell Garden Association) sought to gain people's ideas about the design of the area surrounding the immersion pool, situated in one corner of the new Leechwell Garden in Totnes. The aim was to get two forms of community feedback – general and more specific - about what people would like to see done in this area of the garden. It is estimated that between 80 - 100 people attended the Design Event which was held in Birdwood House, a central exhibition space near the market square.

The Design Event offered participants a broad background to and history of the garden and the immersion pool and a wide variety of poster displays showing various design options for planting, paths, seats and other aspects of the pool area. Participants were asked for three forms of response: to write their ideas and comments on post-it notes and attach these to a large plan of the pool area; to draw and describe their ideas on small individual plans (8 people completed these - they are *starred below) and they were also asked to fill in a simple one-page questionnaire. In all 54 people filled in the questionnaire, some in great detail. The questionnaire asked for two kinds of written feedback-

First, the General Design Framework for the immersion pool, asked how people today felt about the broad consensus of views *already gathered from previous consultations* over the last three years.

Second, in implementing the Design of the Pool, the Pool Group wanted to know how people's *current vision for the pool area* might be operationalised in the planting and design of the area. This section asked participants to comment on various design options and add specific suggestions and ideas of their own.

This report focuses on the 54 completed responses to the questionnaire.

1. SECTION ONE – THE GENERAL DESIGN FRAMEWORK FOR THE IMMERSION POOL

When people were asked in *previous consultations* about what they would like to see done in the pool area of the garden the broad consensus was as follows:

1. That it should be kept as a simple, quiet and contemplative space with seats
2. That it should reflect its ancient sense of place (i.e. mysterious, magical, secret, hidden qualities) through sympathetic planting etc
3. That its heritage should be respected
4. That it should reflect the possible healing aspects of the pool/water
5. That it should incorporate public art- maybe in the form of a new entry pipe or in a separate sculpture
6. That its use as a children's play area should be discouraged for safety and other reasons

In this Pool Design Event, June 2011, people were asked *how far they agreed with this consensus* and the following summarises their feedback.

1.1 A SIMPLE, QUIET AND CONTEMPLATIVE SPACE. As we can see in figure 1, all respondents agreed with previous consultations in believing that the area should be kept as a simple, quiet and contemplative space with seating.

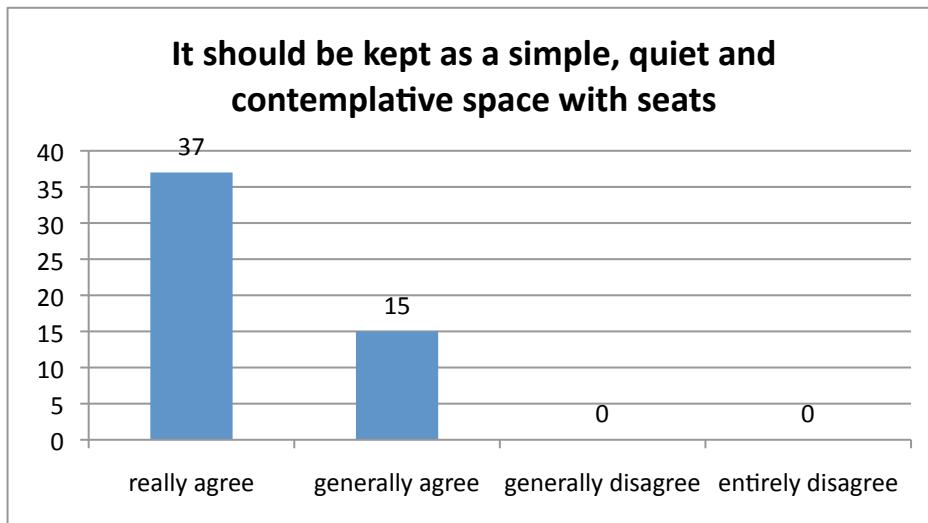


Figure 1

WRITTEN COMMENTS

- 6. Seats should be wooden or at least natural material with no concrete foundations’.
- 19. ‘Like the idea of a more natural area’.
- 31 ‘Yes, keep it a sacred, meditative area but with wildflowers’.
- 32. ‘I hope the pool is left accessible for people to paddle through’.
- 37. ‘Seats need to be thoughtfully placed and shaped – not utilitarian additions.’
- 41. ‘Rustic seating or stone benches.’
- 43. ‘Wild planting’.
- 44. [Keep it simple, quiet etc...] ‘Most crucial’.
- 45. ‘Wild planting’.
- 47. ‘Seats to be positioned to give a view/s down the whole garden’.

1.2 SENSE OF PLACE. There was also a clear consensus as to what the space represented. All of today’s respondents wanted the design to reflect the ancientness of the pool and the area around it (figure 2.) They wanted its mysterious, hidden and magical qualities reflected in the planting

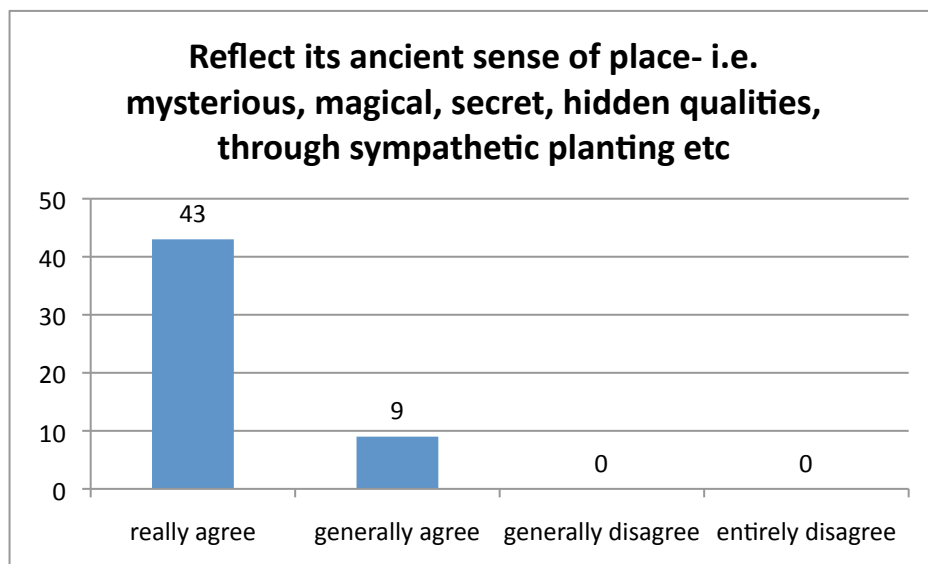


Figure 2

WRITTEN COMMENTS

- 7. 'Appeal to senses, sounds, sight, smell. Water flowing through?'
- 19. 'Wild and native plants are a great idea. Maybe even wild food and herbs.'
- 26. 'Keep it natural, simple, in keeping with the area.'
- 37. 'It is an ancient place and we need continuity with good influences from the past.'
- 41. 'Plant only indigenous plants, shrubs and trees.'
- 44. '[Reflect its ancient sense of place...] 'most crucial'.

1.3/4 HERITAGE AND HEALING. Figures 3 and 4 also show a high level of consensus with almost all of today's responses agreeing that the design should respect its heritage (95%) and reflect the possible healing aspects of the pool/water (96%).

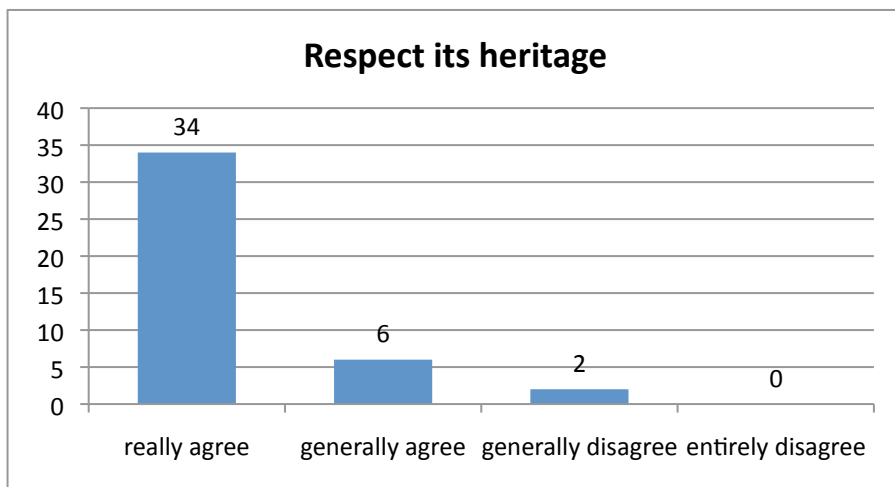


Figure 3

WRITTEN COMMENTS

- 19. 'Don't alter the pool, put anything in it. Simple beauty.'
- 37. 'Awareness of historical continuity.'
- 44. '[Respect its heritage...] 'Most crucial'.

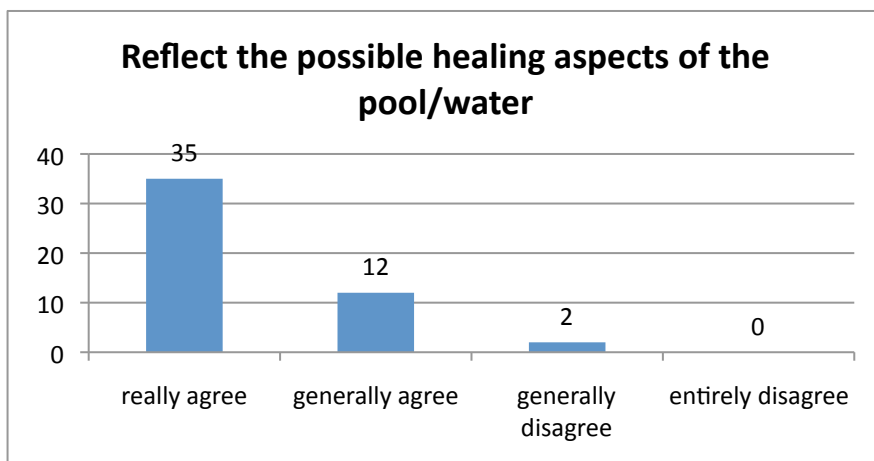


Figure 4

WRITTEN COMMENTS

- 15. 'Leave the pool alone – keep it simple.'
- 19. 'Flowing, healing, a place for reflection.'
- 34. 'yes, but not go too overboard with this'
- 37 'Through peaceful reflections and the quite sounds of water.'
- 41. 'Medical herbs in the wild planting'.
- 44. [Reflect possible healing...] 'Most crucial.'

1.5. PUBLIC ART. There was slightly less consensus regarding the issue of Public Art (Figure 5). While the great majority (81%) wanted the space to incorporate some form of sympathetic public art, some respondents (19%) were not so happy with this.

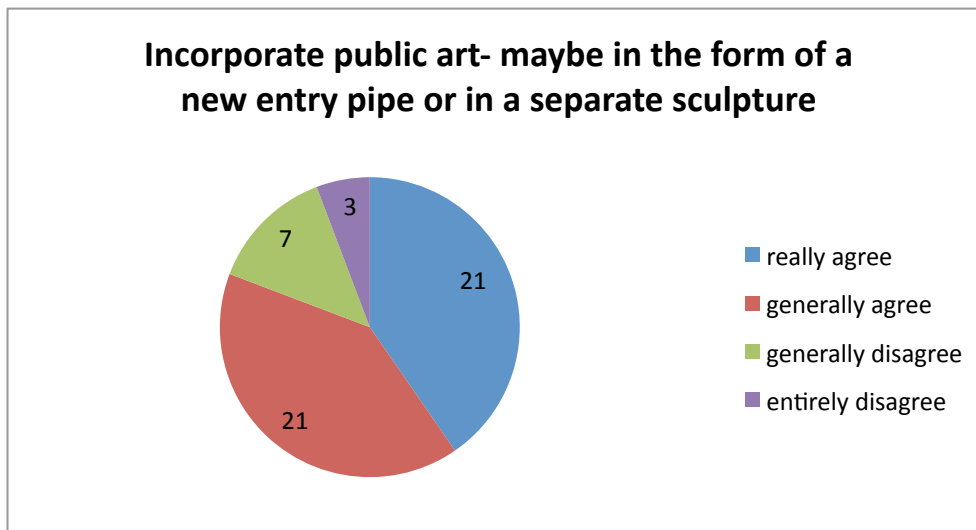


Figure 5

WRITTEN COMMENTS

- 5. This is probably the most difficult question to answer – would need to be done very sympathetically'
- 6. 'I think with beautiful planting and a few beautiful rustic seats there is no need for a piece of art – the space should speak for itself. If there was a sculpture it would be so hard to get it just right'
- 15. 'A bit cheesy I would say'.
- 18. 'Possibly something that blends in with the place – not demanding too much attention'.
- 19 'Work with the energy of the space rather than bringing in new symbolism'.
- 23. 'If in keeping with the atmosphere'.
- 34. 'Only if the art was subtle and organic.'
- 37. There may well be a place for non ostentatious sculpture in trees to the west of the pool. But this pool itself should not be a site for objects d'art!
- 41. 'Hard to please all ideas of what is art. Water entry - natural over rocks.'
- 44. 'Possibly but not essential'.
- 47. 'The whole garden design is the public art!'
- 54. [Don't want public art] 'Keep it simple – water and plants'.

1.6 CHILDREN'S PLAY. For various reasons, including safety, Figure 6 shows that most (75%) wanted to discourage children's play in the area, but a sizable minority (25%) disagreed.

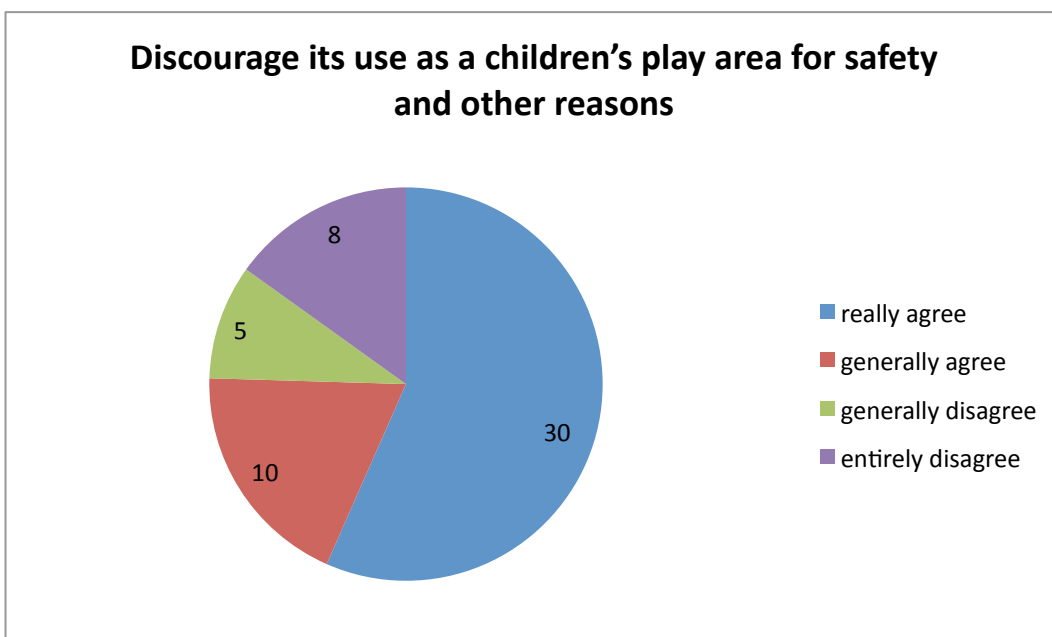


Figure 6

WRITTEN COMMENTS

- 6. 'I don't think it needs active discouragement but not encouragement'
- 7 'Hard not to let children in/ go near.
- 13 'Children should be allowed but with a parent!'
- 15. 'Kids are ok but not a playground'.
- 19. 'A quieter space. Not necessarily *no* children allowed, but no man-made structures, a more peaceful area.'
- 30. 'A quiet area would be nice but would like to encourage children to see a bit of peace here too.'
- 34. 'Everyone should be able to enjoy it'.
- 37. 'Certainly not a 'play area' but children should not be excluded!'
- 41. 'Very sensible to discourage considering its proximity to play areas'.
- 44. [Discourage it use as children's play...] 'Most crucial'.

SECTION TWO – IMPLEMENTING THE DESIGN OF THE POOL.

Having established the *general* framework shaping the garden design people were asked to engage in the more *specific* task of suggesting how this should be operationalised – at a fairly detailed level. To help people visualise different aspects of how the pool area could look a large number and range of design ideas and images were displayed on posters around the room (the poster images that participants quoted are listed in the summaries below). People were asked for their views on the overall look of the pool area – should it be formal or informal? They were then asked to focus on four key aspects of the design – the surfaces surrounding the pool; the seats and the paths; the planting and trees; the boundaries and fences surrounding the pool area.

2.1 OVERALL LOOK OF THE POOL AREA. Analysis of the comments revealed a strong leaning (89%) toward informality – towards the wild side!

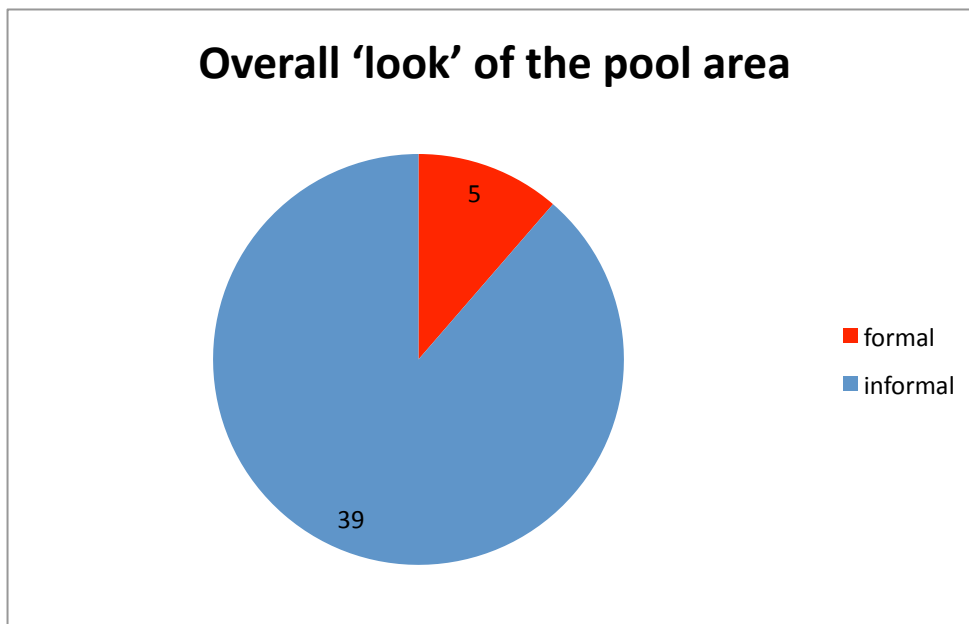


Figure 7

Specific written comments are included below, with questionnaire number.

WRITTEN COMMENTS

INFORMAL/WILD	FORMAL
<p>. *starred respondents provided a detailed design plan.</p> <p>1. Natural, wild</p> <p>5. * Informal semi-wild but neither extreme...too wild and it will take over the small space</p> <p>8. more wild to encourage the bees</p> <p>12 * wild and natural please with profusion of low plants with trees shade as possible</p> <p>15 looks great as it is</p> <p>19. definitely wild, natural but kept tidy and spacious</p> <p>21. ancient sense of place= semi-wild</p> <p>22. wild and meditative</p> <p>27. Plants for wildlife. Reintroduce peacocks</p> <p>31. wild sacred pool perhaps a sacred sculpture</p> <p>33. wild with a beehive</p> <p>37 more on the carefully maintained wild-side</p> <p>38. * try to make it natural looking, though it has to be managed so species chosen should be easily maintained</p> <p>41. Nothing too showy.</p> <p>44. * wilder the better please. Native trees and flowers, shady</p> <p>45. wild, wild, wild</p> <p>48. semi wild looks good, a balance of old and new</p> <p>49. wild side with ferns, wild flowers and splashes of colour</p>	<p>6. * the shape of the pool is not natural so I think a certain amount of symmetry would be good</p> <p>40. probably fairly formal</p> <p>29. as the outside is more wild, maybe slightly more formal</p> <p>POSTERS QUOTED IN RESPONSES</p> <p>A9</p> <p>C3/5/6</p> <p>D3</p> <p>E9</p> <p>H2/4/9</p> <p>J1/8</p>

2.2 VIEWS ON HARD SURFACES SURROUNDING THE POOL. Most people thought that hard surfaces were needed around the pool (90% of those who commented).

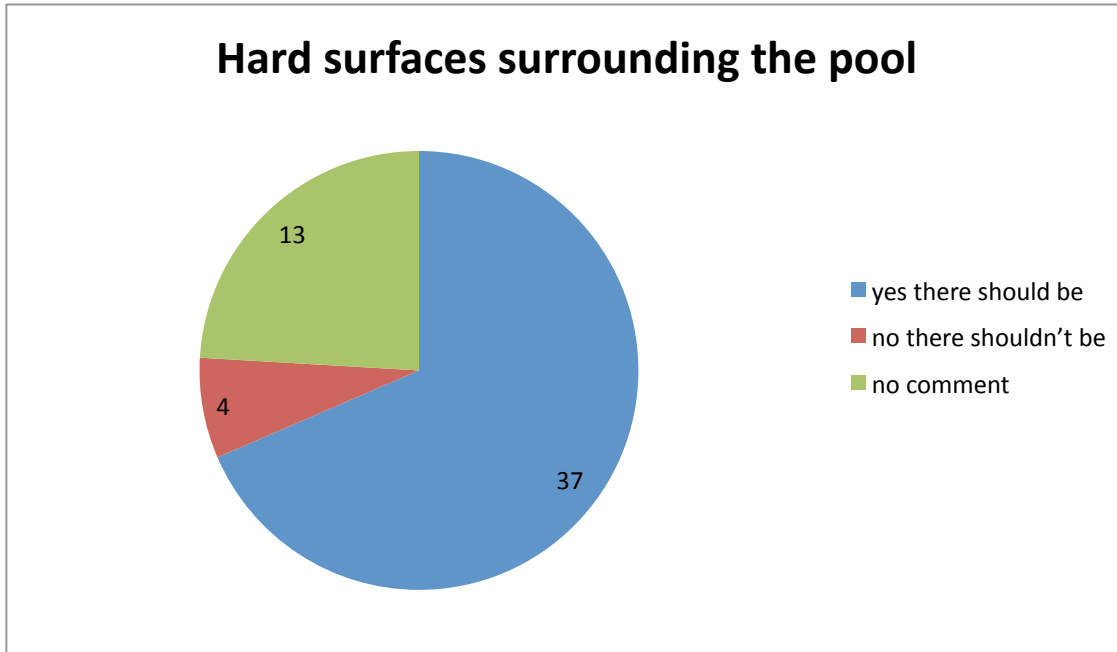


Figure 8

People had good ideas about the kind of surface wanted. Most popular was a natural/minimal (39%) or a stone surface (39%).

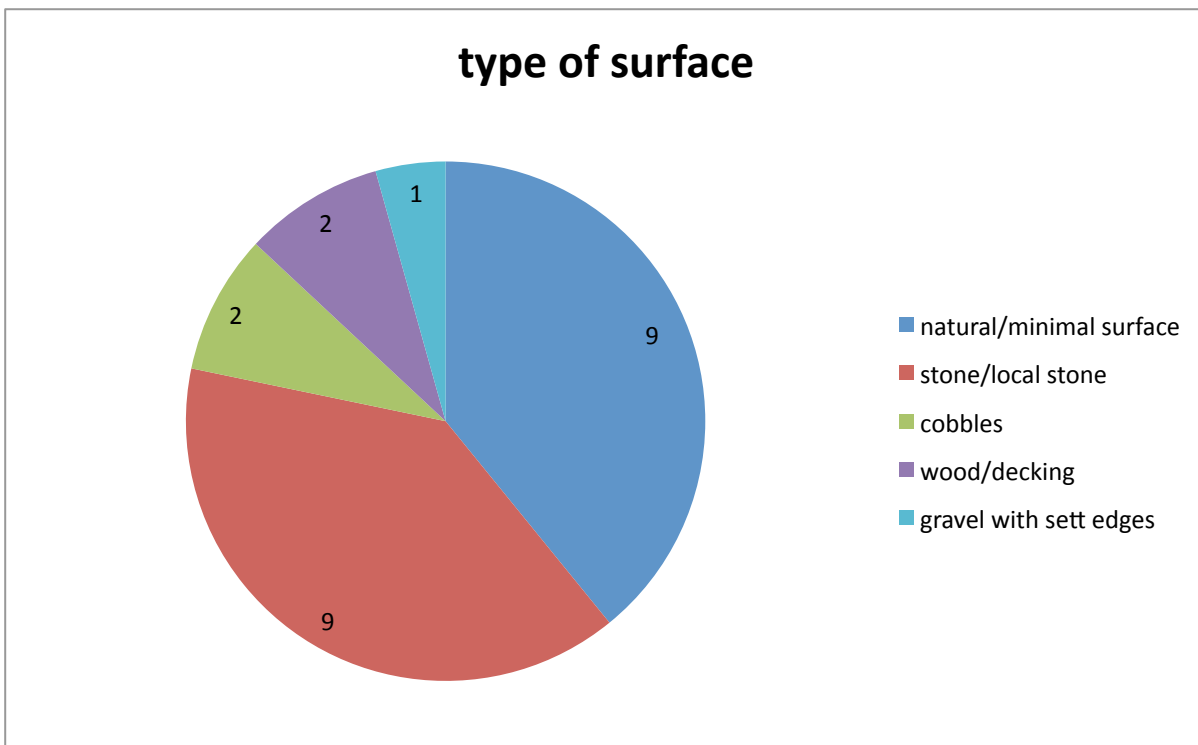


Figure 9

1=hard gravel

2.4 PLANTING AND TREES. For 98% of people who commented it was important to include trees in the design.

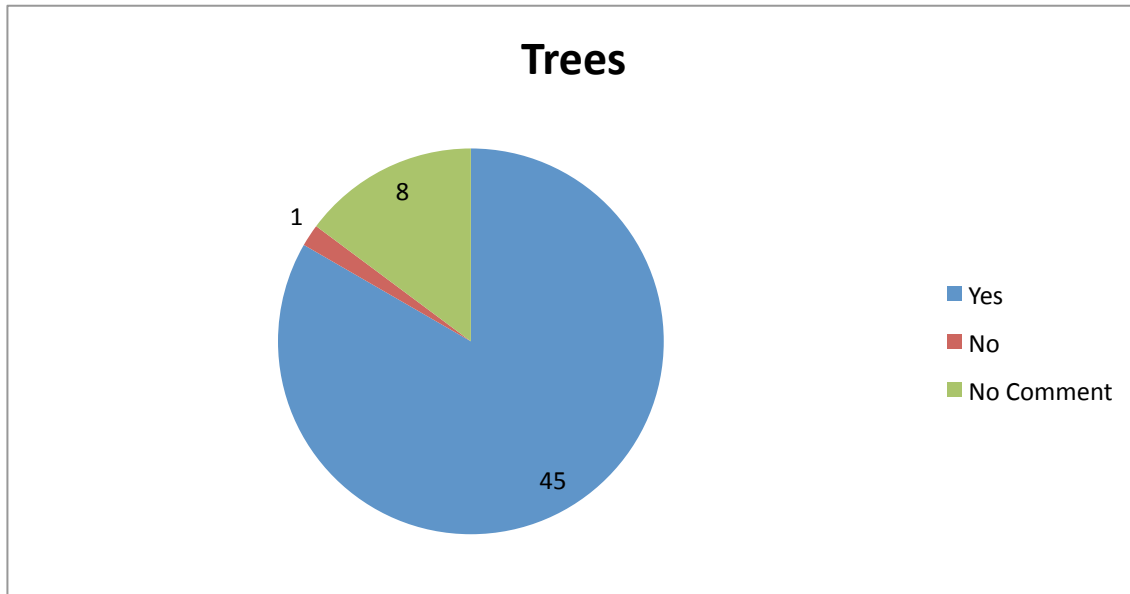


Figure 11

Written Comments

NO TREES	TREES AND PLANTING PLEASE
<p>46.probably insufficient space for trees- also leaves will cause problems on water</p> <p>POSTERS QUOTED IN RESPONSES E1/3/4/5/11/13/14 F3/4/6/7/8/9/11/13</p>	<p>*starred respondents provided a detailed plan.</p> <p>1.Maybe trees would drop leaves into the pool- a problem- so something evergreen</p> <p>2.small ornamental trees (crab) and water-loving plants</p> <p>5.* hostas and arching habit. Small trees. Scented plants in sheltered space</p> <p>6.* small trees maybe birch or cherry planted in symmetry either side of the pool</p> <p>7. elderflower</p> <p>9.simple/natural planting</p> <p>15.fruit bearing trees only</p> <p>17.hazel, may, apple</p> <p>19. I like the forest garden type planting creating a more natural space maybe fruit trees- cherry blossom?</p> <p>20.trees shrubs that would have been common when the pool first used</p> <p>22.mixture of trees</p> <p>23.native trees with under planting to encourage wildlife-bees and butterflies</p> <p>24.native species</p> <p>28.shady</p> <p>31.weeping willow, wild flowers</p> <p>32.wildflowers and long grass</p> <p>33.oak</p> <p>34.food plants, trees and wild forest garden</p> <p>38.* keep planting to native species for wildlife. No overhanging</p> <p>40.lush atmospheric planting</p> <p>41.spindle,willow and wilder indigenous plants</p> <p>47.* natural, wild</p> <p>48.natural attractive</p>

49. water plants, willow, hazel. Nothing large
52. maybe one small tree- maybe acer all-seasons colour.

SPECIFIC PLANTING SUGGESTIONS

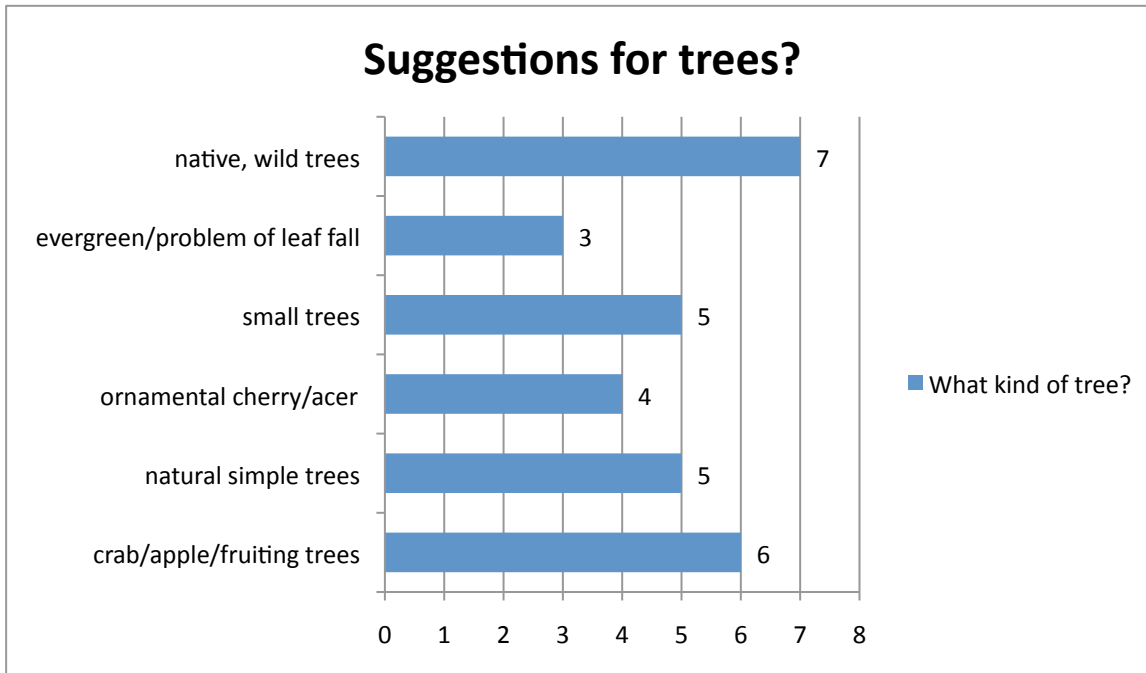


Figure 12

Notes

Trees mentioned by name: willow, hazel, birch, spindle, elder, may, oak, crab, cherry, acer

Plants mentioned by name: all kinds of ferns, heucheras, iris, lavender, primula, primrose, hosta, foxgloves, native grasses, buttercup, comfrey, flags, rushes, marsh marigolds, water avens, purple loosestrife, meadow sweet, wild angelica, bog myrtle, water lilies

What kind of planting? 15=mentioned plants/ground cover. 5=wildflowers (but wild flowers come up as a key theme throughout the whole Questionnaire)

General comments on planting: Simple natural shady/wildflowers/ encourage wildlife/ forest garden style/soft planting/lush/scented

2.5 BOUNDARIES- WALLS AND FENCES- TO THE POOL AREA. All saw the need to create some form of boundary to set the area apart. Most favoured a more minimalist approach, using natural planting.

COMMENTS

Natural – light touch

***starred respondents provided a detailed plan.**

- 1. Discrete would be good- maybe natural boundary- willow
- 2. low hedging with hedged arch to enter pool area
- 6. * no fences or walls. Planting to avoid a direct route to pool- see map
- 9. green
- 11. replace fence with something more sympathetic painted to disguise it and make edges indistinct
- 17. green
- 19. simple as possible
- 23. soft edges with foliage
- 24. willow fencing and natural hedges
- 26. * as natural as possible, but maintain safety
- 30. yes if being set aside as a quiet area
- 34. Could be made of natural materials- willow?
- 37. One entry point as at present gate. Not an enclosure but planting to discourage approach from other directions
- 38. * plan there is already a hedge on the West. The hedge on the East should be attractive when viewed from the bridge and as a backdrop to the seat if it is placed at the base of the pool. South side?? Wild roses and honeysuckle.
- 44. * plan green more natural shape to blend with rest of the garden
- 46. Natural look fencing- not walls. Don't box it in.
- 49. should define the area but be unobtrusive
- 53. natural hedging/willow

More structural

***starred respondents provided a detailed plan.**

- 5. *semi-screening nice idea for sheltering- I think also having it gated is good also because the children's area is so close by (stray kids). I like the willow structure as a fence
- 15. stone walls(don't be overprotective- I have concerns that with good intentions- its getting overdesigned)
- 31. woven willow
- 32. drywalling
- 40. stone wood but no metal
- 41. Traditional hurdles with something secure integrated.
- 43. wood
- 45. wooden fences
- 47. * dry stone walls/wattle fences
- 52. fence with greenery
- 48. perhaps stone in keeping with existing walls

POSTERS QUOTED IN RESPONSES

- G/1/ 6/ 14
- H/9
- J/2