

Introduction

This document summarises the key themes emerging from the 2025 Central Square Consultation survey conducted by the Hampstead Garden Suburb Trust. The consultation ran from early September until 31 October 2025 and was shared widely with residents and stakeholders across various platforms. This included print publications such as the *Trust Times* and *Suburb News*; email newsletters from the Residents' Association, local churches, synagogues and schools; physical noticeboards around the Suburb; and features at the Annual General Meeting and on the Trust website. Respondents were invited to comment through the online survey as well as by email correspondence. We also offered a means to view and provide feedback to those parties that felt they were not able to access the material online. The Trust received over 200 responses which have been reviewed individually and summarised to reflect the themes with the strongest support as well as the key concerns raised.

Broadly speaking, the Hampstead Garden Suburb Trust's proposal to make changes to the space west of Central Square received positive feedback across responses, with only a few respondents expressing opposition to making changes to the space. Many respondents also took this as an opportunity to thank the Trust for the opportunity to comment on the use of the space west of Central Square.

While the consultation document itself sought feedback on three main themes (Leisure and Amenity, Café and Children's Play and Nature and Ecology), responses primarily discussed four categories of use: Children's Play, Racquet Sports, Nature and Ecology and Café / Food and Beverage.

This report summarises the views raised in relation to these four categories to develop a picture of how residents of Hampstead Garden Suburb would like to see the space west of Central Square developed. This feedback will be used to help shape the next stage of planning.

Summary of results: What did respondents like and dislike?

This section summarises responses to the Central Square Consultation survey, grouped into the four main themes which arose in the data. These themes were determined through thematic analysis of survey responses. While this survey was purely qualitative and exploratory, tallying sentiment both for and against each of the four themes from the question ‘For each of the following themes, please tell us what you like, dislike, or would change...’ can provide an estimation of support for themes amongst respondents (See Figure 2). The descriptive findings which follow highlight supportive views, concerns, and representative quotations for each suggested use.

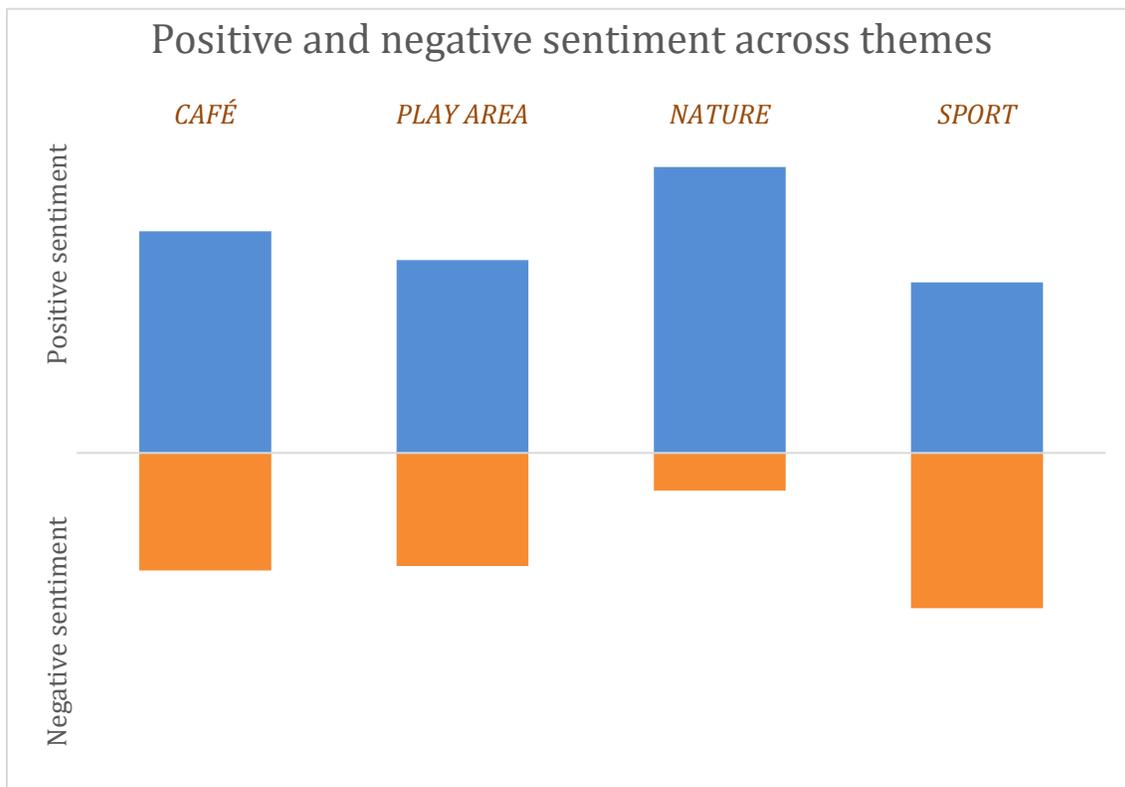


Figure 2: Positive and negative sentiment across the four themes, from the question ‘For each of the following themes, please tell us what you like, dislike, or would change...’

1. Children’s Play

Support

Many respondents expressed support for the idea of using the space for a children’s play area, describing it as something this part of the Suburb currently lacks. It was particularly noted that a play area for very young children would be beneficial for the Suburb, and that it

should use natural materials. Combining the children’s play with a café was also a popular option, especially among parents and grandparents.

- “ “There isn’t a children’s park that is a close walk by. And I think it really is necessary.”
- “ “Definitely come more often if there was a playground.”
- “ “I love the idea for a cafe and kids area, there is nowhere in this area which is good to take young children.”

Concerns

A smaller number of respondents raised reservations about developing a children’s play area in the space. The most common concerns related to increased noise and safety of the space. While generation of noise was a common concern across all activities, safety was a particular concern as some felt that children’s play areas need to be in more visible areas.

- “ “A cafe and children's play area is unduly noisy and will disturb the local residents.”
- “ “Any children's play area would need to be adjacent to the footpath in a cleared area so that they could play in full sight”
- “ It is dark and not currently very visible to people in Central Square or Willifield Way. It is therefore neither very inviting nor a safe area, especially for children.”

2. Racquet Sports (Tennis, Pickleball, Padel)

Support

Racquet sports was a controversial topic among respondents, however a significant number of respondents expressed enthusiasm for this use of the space which is an existing, but unused, pair of tennis courts. Supporters of pickleball and padel courts felt these would add a new activity to the Suburb which is inclusive for a variety of age groups, and consistent with the values of the Suburb. Tennis received similar support, with the additional point of it being the traditional use of the area. Most of those in favour of racquet sports noted it would increase their use of the area.

- “ “Pickleball great because young people and senior citizens alike can participate.”
- “ “This area originally had tennis courts so it would be good to maintain a sports option...will also preserve the original intention of the area.”
- “ “Pickleball is a must. Very social activity, not very technical, therefore it will become popular quickly”

Concerns

The primary concern relating to racquet sports was noise. A sizeable number of respondents felt that the noise generated by the likes of padel and pickleball would be unacceptable to the neighbouring residents and detract from the peaceful feeling of Central Square. Another common concern was duplication, given the large availability of tennis courts already existing in the Suburb.

- “ “Opposed to pickle ball, table tennis, etc. as these are intrusive noise producers.”
- “ “No pickleball or noisy activities due to houses being nearby”
- “ “We do not need any more tennis-related things like pickleball courts or table tennis!”

3. Nature and Ecology (including Quiet/Relaxation Areas)

Support

Nature and ecology was the most widely supported use of the space in the consultation. Respondents noted many benefits of enhancing nature in this area, including alignment with the values of the Suburb, providing peaceful relaxation space and the ecological benefits of conserving wildlife habitat. A number of ideas for how to enhance nature in this space were suggested, including wildflowers, ponds, beehives, edible shrubs and nature trails.

- “ “Nature and ecology are key to the area and anything else here would seriously impact the ecology of the area.”
- “ “Big YES OF COURSE to Nature and Ecology - we live in a “GARDEN” suburb - The clue is in the name!”
- “ “Wildflowers and quiet spaces for thoughtful contemplation are much more in keeping with the original idea of a garden suburb.”

Concerns

Despite strong support for the nature and ecology theme, there were a few common concerns raised. Respondents wanted to see a maintained nature area, rather than a wild or unkempt one. A few participants cautioned that balancing biodiversity with safety and accessibility was important, noting that secluded public areas can attract undesirable and antisocial behaviours. Another common criticism of this use of the space was that it would duplicate other parts of the Suburb, such as Big Wood and the Heath Extension.

- “ “Nature and ecology must also not be confused with allowing overgrowth and ramshackle looking "greenery".”
- “ “Why spend more money on green areas when HGS is a conservation area and we have the Heath?”
- “ “I like the proposals but my main concern is the safeguarding of areas that might be used at night for undesirable activities.”

4. Café / Food and Beverage

Support

There was widespread support for the idea of a café in Central Square. Supporters saw it as something that was currently missing from the space, which could bring more life and vibrancy to the Square. People liked the idea of a small, community café that could serve as

a hub for the community and a place to visit during a walk. They felt it would improve their experience of living in the Suburb and increase their visits to the area.

- “ I think the area is crying out for a permanent indoor and outdoor cafe with decent opening hours”
- “ A café would make me visit more often, especially in winter.”
- “ A small kiosk with good coffee would be perfect.”
- “ I would actively come to the café with my dogs if it provides nice surroundings.”

Concerns

The development of a café in Central Square also faced strong opposition from some. Similar to the concerns related to racquet sports and children’s play, respondents were worried about increased noise and foot traffic. This was particularly for neighbouring properties, who had additional concerns about privacy. Many also felt there are enough cafés in the Suburb already and that a new one might detract from the square’s peaceful character.

- “ Definitely not a café - there are so many in the Suburb.”
- “ The idea of a central kiosk/café sounds great but I have real doubts about its viability in such a location.”
- “ No cafe please. This will attract day trippers and visitors from further afield, increase traffic and litter.”

5. Neighbouring residents

While most respondents provided postcodes from within the suburb, several respondents self-identified as being neighbouring residents to the proposed site of development. Thematic coding of these responses revealed a number of commonalities in opinions as well as some differences. While neighbouring residents were split on whether they supported a café or children’s play area, they were generally in agreement on their support for nature and ecology, with a focus on tranquillity as an important value to uphold.

- “ Should be used for nature and ecology only”
- “ We welcome the proposal to conserve and enhance the existing tree belts and support the introduction of more biodiversity”

Neighbouring residents’ main concerns regarded noise, privacy and safety and they were generally in opposition to the use of the area for racquet sports.

- “ I am concerned re security and safety for my property”
- “ We strongly oppose the proposal...This would create intrusive activity and noise”
- “ Loud games such as pickleball and padel will be unwelcome”

Discussion and conclusion

This consultation intended to capture feedback from Hampstead Garden Suburb residents and stakeholders on a set of early ideas for proposed enhancements to the Central Square area. The results of the consultation can begin to offer a vision of what residents' and stakeholders want to see for the future of Central Square. This vision will be developed and refined over time, however this initial consultation offers an exciting start.

All suggested uses of the space received a high level of support, with some receiving more mentions than others. In particular, using the space for nature/ecology purposes received the strongest support based on how frequently it was mentioned positively. This was almost unanimously supported amongst neighbouring residents. The children's play area also received strong support, however some respondents noted downsides to these uses. In particular, respondents were concerned that the secluded nature of the space would present safety concerns for a play area and commercial viability concerns for a café (due to lack of foot traffic and visibility). Respondents were also concerned about the level of noise which could be generated by both a café and a children's play area. Noise was also a key concern relating to the various racquet sports proposed, while the traditional use of tennis courts at the site was acknowledged.

Overall, while respondents had varied views on the best use of the space, there was overwhelming support for the Trust's initiative in both seeking to improve this space and providing residents the opportunity to comment. Although there is strong support and demand for amenities such as a café, a children's play area and racquet sports courts, a curated nature/ecology theme was most favoured. A space focused on nature and ecology could include other suggested features such as picnic tables, a pond and an educational component such as interpretation panels. As a shared space with other landowners, their views on the area will be key and we encourage collaboration to see how the themes contained in this survey might be realised in collaboration with all stakeholders. It is worth considering how ideas that could include the Inspire Centre might contribute to the vision, and whether areas near to it would be considered safe for a children's play area. A collaborative endeavour underpinned by the values of the Suburb could allow this currently underutilised area to transform into a cherished asset to the Suburb in the long term.