community conversations

South Gloucestershire Council

Delivering with you

Future for Grimsbury Farm

Public engagement feedback report

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Executive summary

There has been much public interest in the future of Grimsbury Farm since the council raised concerns about the financial challenges it was facing. A Community Conversation public engagement sought feedback about what aspects of the farm's facilities are most important to people and what other factors we should consider when selecting which organisation might be best placed to manage it going forward.

875 people completed the engagement survey and others shared feedback at two onsite public drop-in events and during an online focus group. The Community Conversation engagement exercises have shown how close an emotional attachment many local people have to the farm. Their priority is to keep the facility running as close to how it has been managed as possible i.e. a working farm, which is free for the public to visit.

However, people recognise the financial challenges the farm faces and 94.4% of respondents said they would be willing to pay for entry to help keep it going as a viable concern. The consensus is that an entry fee of up to £2 per person would be reasonable, though some people were willing to consider paying more. For most people, charging for entry wouldn't have a significant impact on their likelihood of visiting, though local people might go to a park instead of the more spontaneous visits they currently make to the farm.

All the facilities and features asked about through the survey were considered important. The most important were those that are most valued by the main visitor group (families with young children), for example:

- The range of animals,
- Play facilities,
- Space to run around,
- Café.

People suggested that some parts of the farm site were currently under-utilised and identified opportunities for the farm to generate new income based on what they had seen work well at other similar visitor attractions. However, in making the farm more financially viable, people didn't want to lose what is special about it. The selected partner should share the council's ethos that the farm is a vital community asset and should seek to maximise the social benefits that the farm provides.

Going forward, people are willing to work with the council, its chosen partner and other stakeholders to build on the farm's previous successes. Many are happy to give up their time as volunteers or to contribute financially through entry charges or donations to keep this much-loved community asset going.

Background

Grimsbury Farm is owned by South Gloucestershire Council. It is located on land set aside to provide an open space for local people and currently includes grass paddocks, woodland, farm buildings, a duck pond, a playground, a cafe run by The

Brandon Trust, and a range of poultry and large and small animals. It is a much-loved public open space which local people have been enjoying for many years.

Over the last few years, operating costs for the farm have increased. At the same time, the council has lost significant income received from an agricultural education provider who made use of the large animals on the farm. This means the farm now costs taxpayers roughly £250,000 per year to cover the shortfall in income, with about three quarters of those costs paying for the upkeep of large farm animals.

As a short-term cost-saving measure, we had been considering removing the large farm animals. However, this would not secure the long-term viability of the farm and so we have therefore looked at other options.

Options for the farm's future

Ahead of this engagement exercise the council received a great deal of feedback from local people. People told us the farm was important to them and that they wanted the council to explore options which would keep the farm open to the public to visit with affordable entry and retaining as many facilities and animals as possible.

Local people suggested opportunities to raise income or reduce costs which have been included alongside the ideas generated through this engagement.

Given the challenges facing the farm and the council’s wider financial pressures, we believe the best way forward is to identify a charitable or not for profit organisation with the background, resources and infrastructure to partner with us in running the farm in a way which supports our ethos of maintaining access to nature and the countryside for the local community.

We believe there are organisations interested in taking on the farm. Through the engagement, we wanted to hear from the people who visit the farm and other stakeholders what they love about the farm to help us choose which organisation might be best placed to manage it going forward.

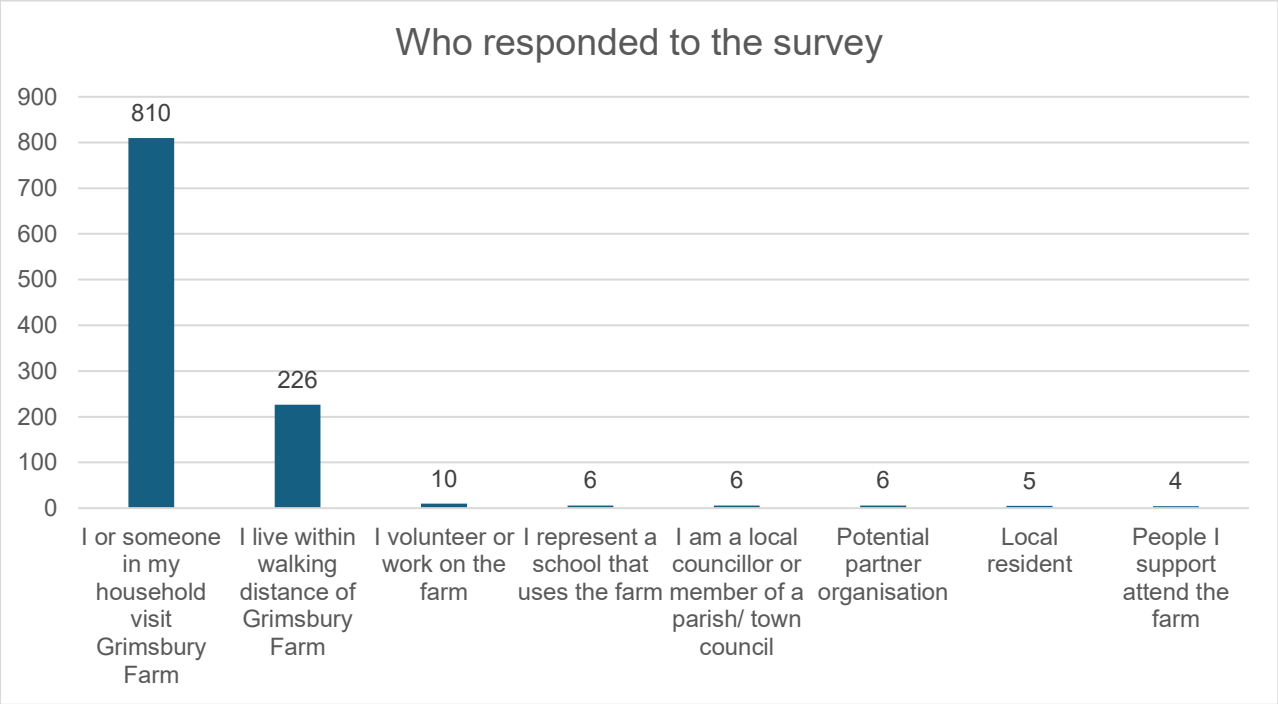
The public engagement

An engagement survey was open from Friday 09 May to Sunday 01 June 2025. The feedback collected through the survey built on the insight we had collected from earlier conversations with local people. Further qualitative feedback was sought at two in-person events held on the farm and through an online mini-focus group with representatives from Kingswood Town Council and Oldland Parish Council.

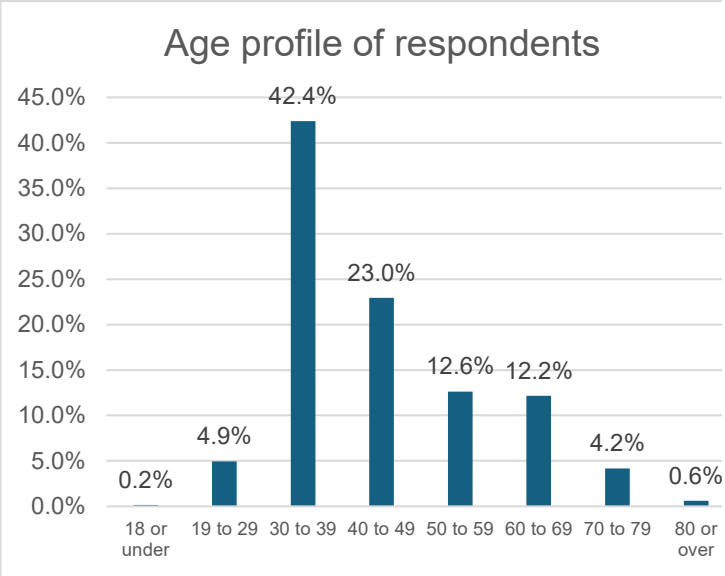
An online CommonPlace site provided background to the situation and an update on the options to enable people to provide informed feedback. Local people were kept informed about the situation facing the farm and the engagement process through wide-ranging promotion, including regular social media posts and updates in the council’s resident newsletter.

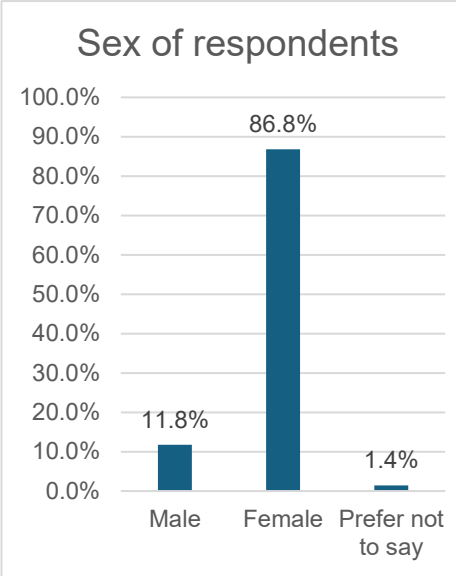
Survey respondents

In total, 875 people responded to the engagement survey. Most respondents completed the survey because they are regular visitors to the farm. A significant subset of the visitors live within walking distance of the farm. The survey was also completed by other farm users including schools and people who support disabled people. Ten responses came from people who work or volunteer on the farm, six local councillors and six people representing organisations who would like to partner with the council to run the farm also provided feedback.



The profile of survey respondents generally reflects the profile of farm visitors. 42.4% are aged 30 to 39. 78% of those under 40 were parents with children under 5. A further quarter of respondents are aged 50 to 69, which would fit with the number of people who said they usually took their grandchildren to the farm; 64% of those aged 60+ visited with children under 5 and 45% with school-age children. 86.8% of respondents are women.

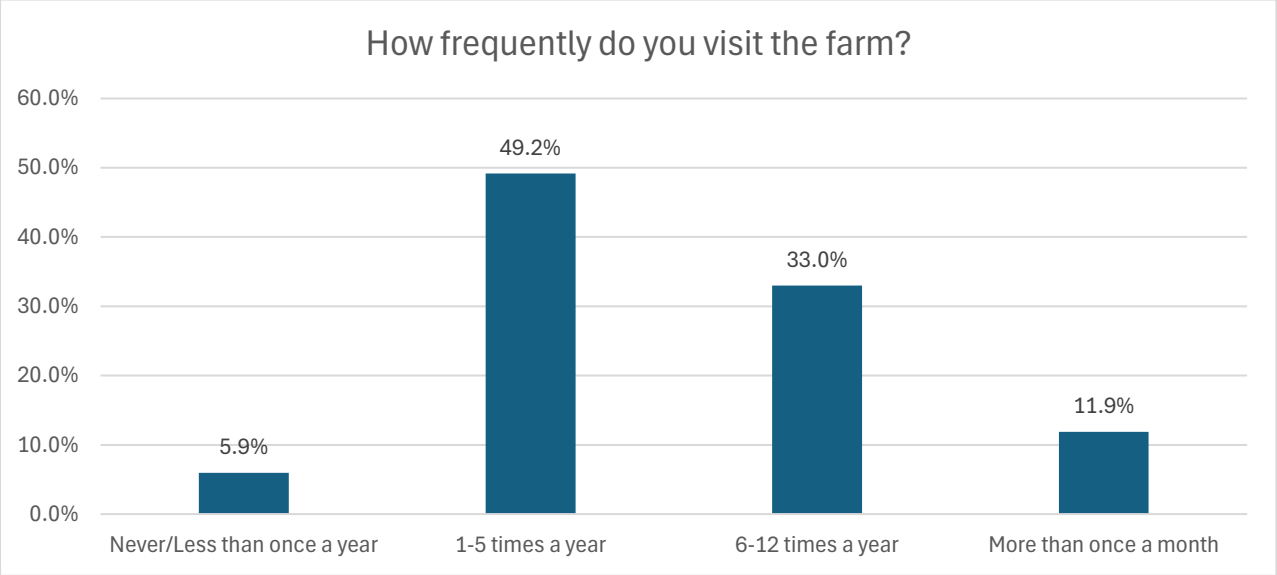


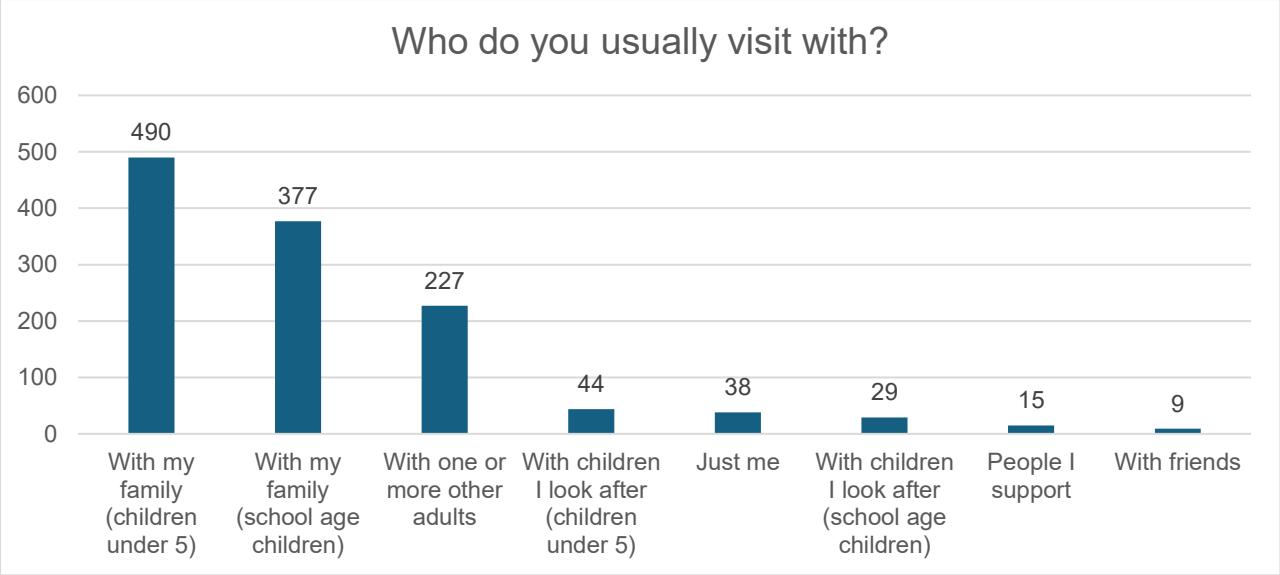


Given the relatively young age profile of respondents, a relatively large proportion (19.1%) of respondents are disabled. It is notable from the comments how much families of neurodivergent people and those with learning disabilities value Grimsbury Farm.

Respondents' visits to the farm

It is helpful both for this analysis and for potential partners to understand a little about who visits the farm. We were interested to find out how frequently people visit the farm and who they usually come with.





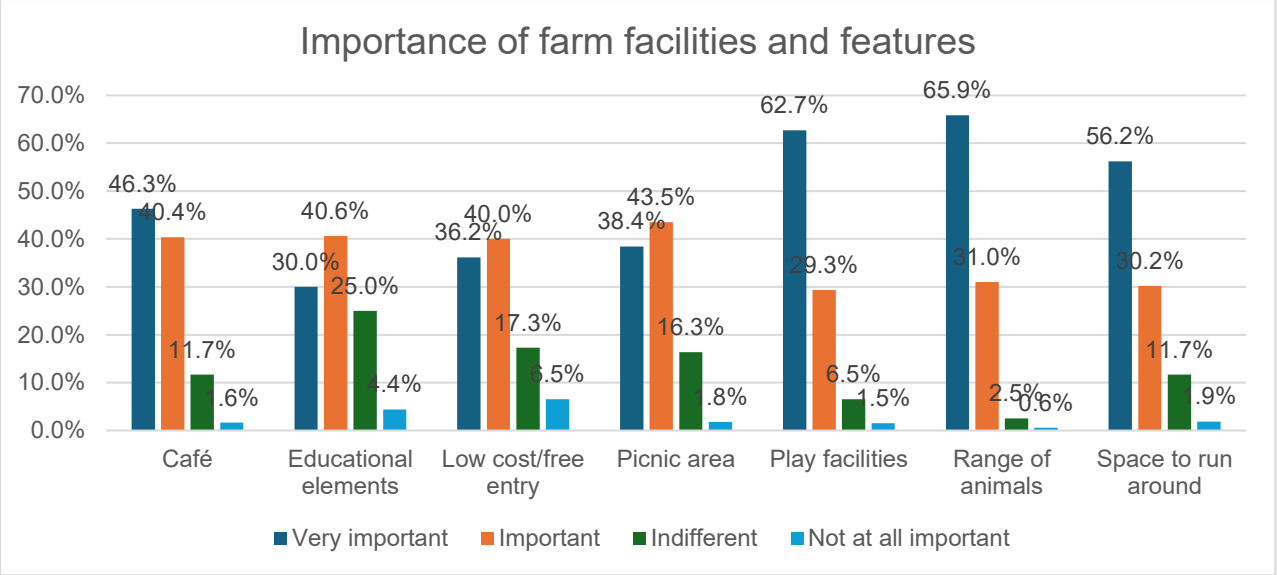
Again, the data supports the assumption that survey respondents reflect typical farm visitors, predominantly families with young children.

11.9% of respondents (100 people) said they visited the farm at least once a month. In the commentary, several people who live locally said that because Grimsbury Farm is free to attend, they would visit the farm spontaneously either on a walk or as a free/cheap activity to keep toddlers and young children entertained. Most people were less frequent visitors; 49.2% of respondents said they would go to the farm 1-5 times per year and a third said it was more likely 6-12 times in a year.

Which facilities are most valued?

From initial discussions with local people, it was clear that their number one priority was to maintain public access to the farm. The engagement survey was built on the assumption that the facility would remain in its current form as a working farm which remained open to the public to visit.

On this basis, respondents were asked which facilities and features of the farm's current offering were most important. This information will be used to guide discussions with potential partners about their plans for the farm.



All the listed facilities and features were considered important. The survey comments echo previous feedback from local people about how important the farm is to them. Their priority is to keep the facility running as close to how it has been managed as possible i.e. a working farm, which is free for the public to visit.

As we've seen, the current main visitor profile is families with young children, so it logically follows that the facilities which are most valued are those that are important to this group:

- The range of animals
- Play facilities
- Space to run around
- Café

Maintaining low cost or free entry is important or very important to 76.2% of respondents, but their priority is to maintain the facilities.

Having a cafe is much more likely to be very important to women (49% vs.32% of men). A picnic area is also much more likely to be important to women (38% vs 25% of male respondents), as are play facilities (65% very important vs 48% of male respondents). A range of animals was more likely to be important to female respondents (69% vs 57% of men).

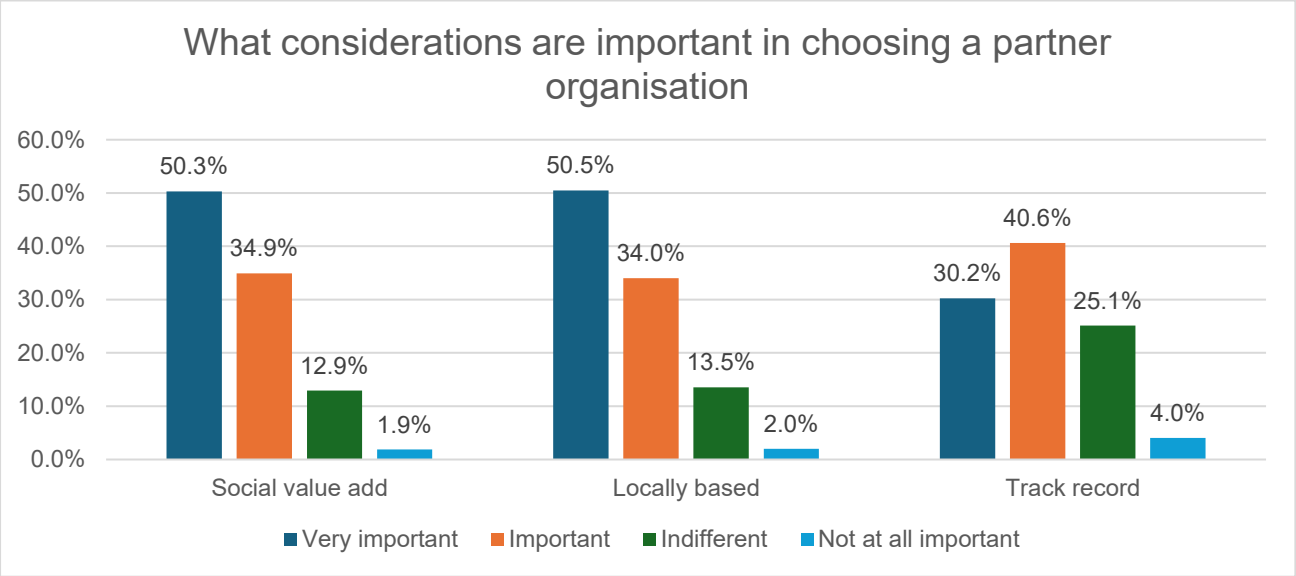
Disabled respondents were significantly more likely to consider educational elements to be very important (44% vs 28% non-disabled respondents), and say that low cost/ free entry was very important (50% vs 33% non-disabled respondents

Respondents from a 'white non-British' ethnic background were significantly more likely to find play facilities very important (79% vs 60% White British respondents)

What type of organisation would be best placed to manage the farm?

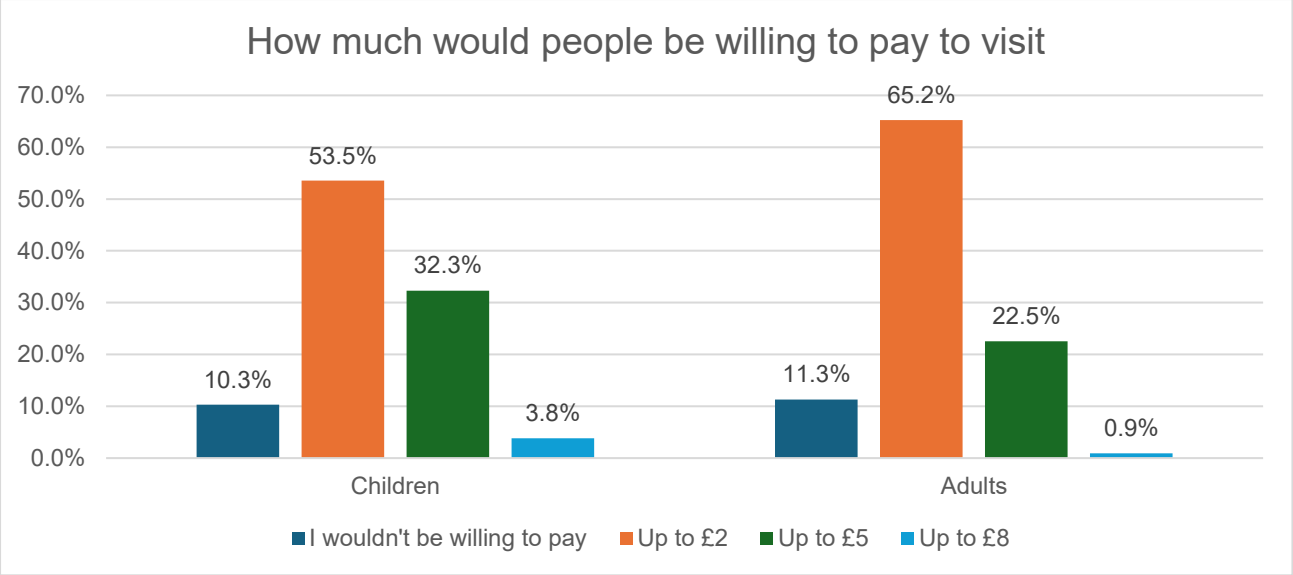
As well as understanding what facilities are most important, we also wanted local people to guide decisions about what sort of organisation might be best to partner with. A locally based organisation which would be able to make a positive social value contribution as part of their involvement would be appreciated. A track record was seen as slightly less important, though given the scale of the farm and the financial risks with a facility of this size, this would need to be a consideration in any decision.

Respondents aged under 40 were less likely to consider these elements very important: adding social value was selected by 42% of under 40s vs 54% of over 40s, being locally based was very important to 44% of under 40s vs 59% of over 40s, and having a track record was very important to over-60s in particular (44%) but only 25% of under-40s.



Are people willing to pay to visit the farm?

The engagement survey introduced the possibility of an entry fee to help subsidise the costs of running the site. People were asked through separate questions how much they thought it reasonable to pay as an entry fee for children and adults.



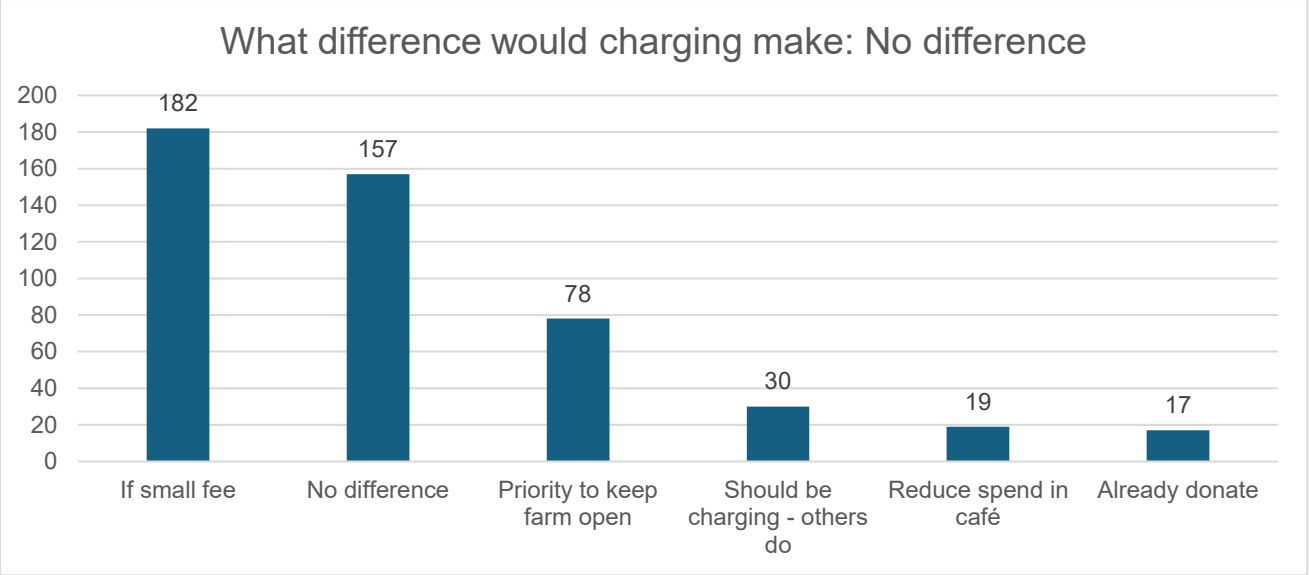
Very few people are completely opposed to the concept of paying to visit the farm. Only 49 people (5.6%) said that they wouldn't be willing to pay for either child or adult entry (the higher proportions shown in the graph represent people who have said that families should only pay for either children or for adult tickets to enter).

The consensus is that an entry fee of up to £2 per person would be reasonable, though some people were willing to consider paying more.

Men were significantly less likely to be willing to pay per adult (20% wouldn't pay vs 10% of women said they wouldn't). Disabled respondents were significantly more likely to say they wouldn't be willing to pay entry for children (25% vs 8% of non-disabled respondents). Respondents under 40 were the most willing to pay an entry fee per adult (92% vs 86% of those aged 40+) and were also the most willing to pay a little more per adult (27% up to £5 vs 17% for those 40+).

In exploring the opportunity to charge an entry fee to increase income, we were keen to understand what the impacts might be on visitor numbers.

It would make no difference



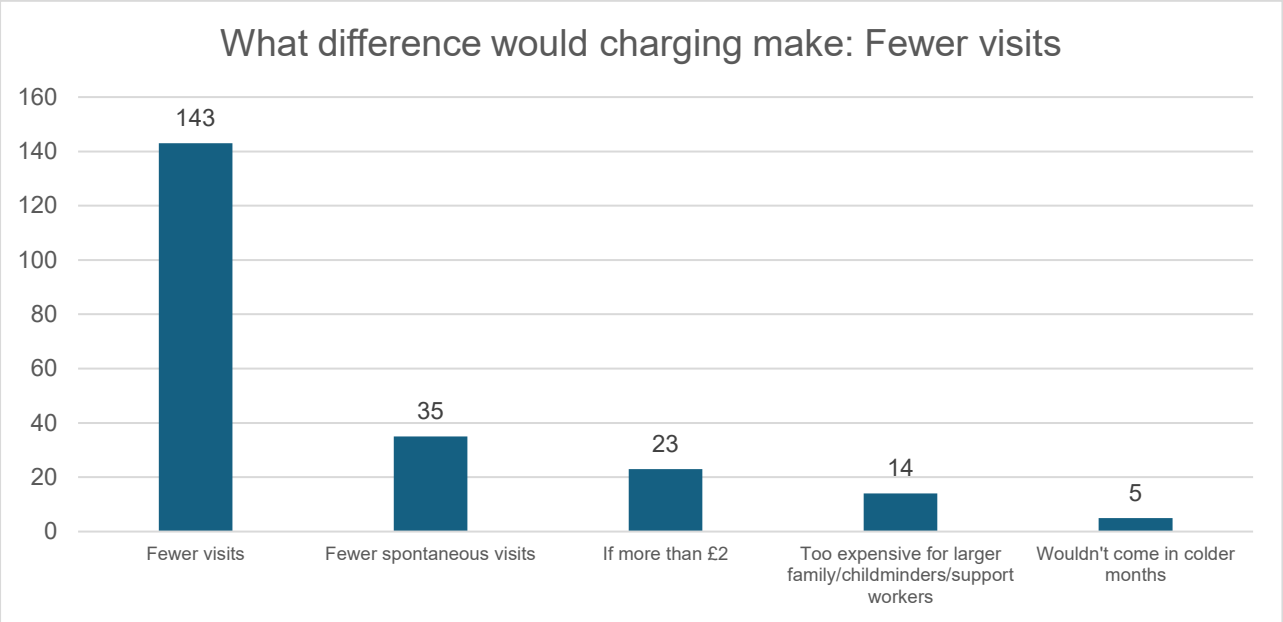
The largest number of responses were from people who said that charging would make no difference to how often they visited. 182 people said that if this was only a nominal charge (similar to the £2 per person proposed), then they would see this as a reasonable price to pay for what is offered. 157 people said that charging would make no difference, making no reference to what fee they might be willing to pay. Amongst this group were a lot of people who said that their priority was to keep the farm open and they were willing to make a financial contribution towards this. 17 people said that charging would make no difference because they already donate when they currently visit.

> *"I would rather pay an entrance fee and feel like I am contributing to the farm and its maintenance than get something for free that I know is struggling financially"*

30 people said that they were surprised an entry fee wasn't already charged as most similar attractions already do this – this was especially common feedback amongst farm visitors during on-site engagement discussions.

It was clear from several comments that some people didn't recognise that the café is operated independently of the farm (in highlighting alternative ways to raise money, people suggested increasing prices in the café). 19 people said that whilst charging for entry would make little difference to how often they visited, they would likely reduce how much they spent in the café to compensate.

I'd visit less frequently



A sizeable proportion of people said that whilst they were happy to pay to visit, this would probably mean they would visit less frequently. Many people told us they currently visit Grimsbury Farm spontaneously. This is especially the case for parents with young children, where the farm is seen as somewhere they can take toddlers to get out of the house and get some fresh air. Because entry is free, they aren't concerned if (as sometimes happens) their child isn't in the mood, and they can go home after a short walk. According to the analysis collected here, charging for entry would likely reduce the number of visits from this group, who would also less likely visit during colder months or when the weather is inclement.

In contrast to this feedback, one person believed that charging an entry fee added a perceived value to the farm, which would encourage more people to visit.

"I would probably visit less often. We sometimes only visit so my children can play in the park for half an hour and if this was going to cost I would drive to a different local park that had no entrance fee."

"Charging a small fee, handled responsibly, may actually increase the perceived value of the farm and attract more intentional, engaged visitors."

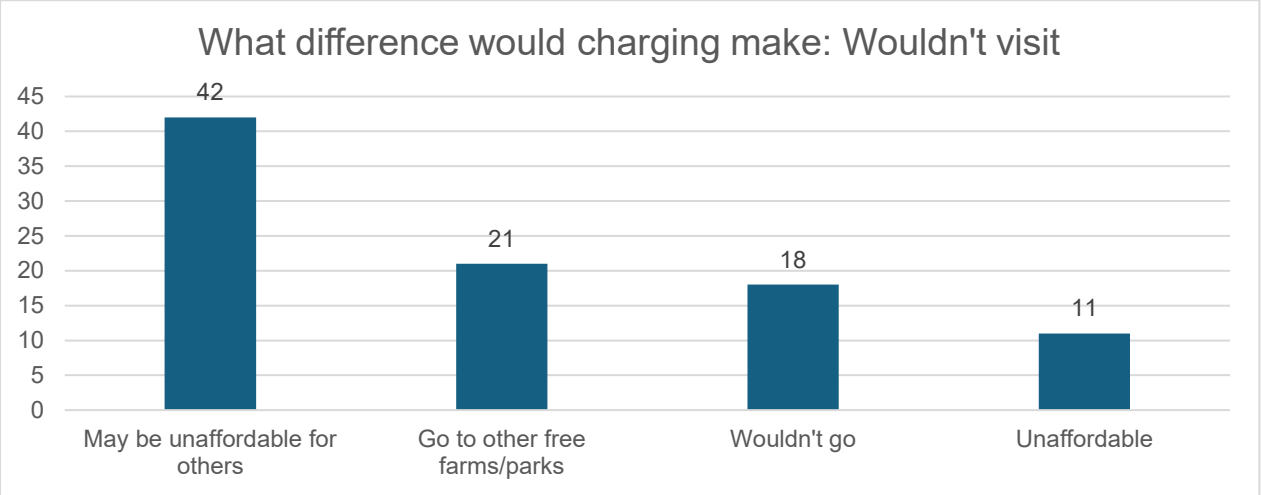
The level of entry fee would impact behaviour. Several people commented that charging more than £2 per person to visit would mean that they might go elsewhere - larger family groups or childminders would be especially likely to reduce the frequency of their visits.

Through the survey, 89 people commented that whilst they would still continue to visit if an entry fee was charged, they had noticed that in recent visits there were fewer animals and facilities were looking quite tired. They felt that if an entrance fee was introduced, they would expect to see a broader range of animals and investment

in facilities. Four people expressed this sentiment more vociferously and said that it wasn't worth paying for what was currently on site. With few animals and facilities, for some people, the entry fee is seen more as a contribution to keep the site running/maintain a green space on their doorstep.

I wouldn't visit anymore

A smaller number of people would be put off visiting altogether if an entry fee was charged.

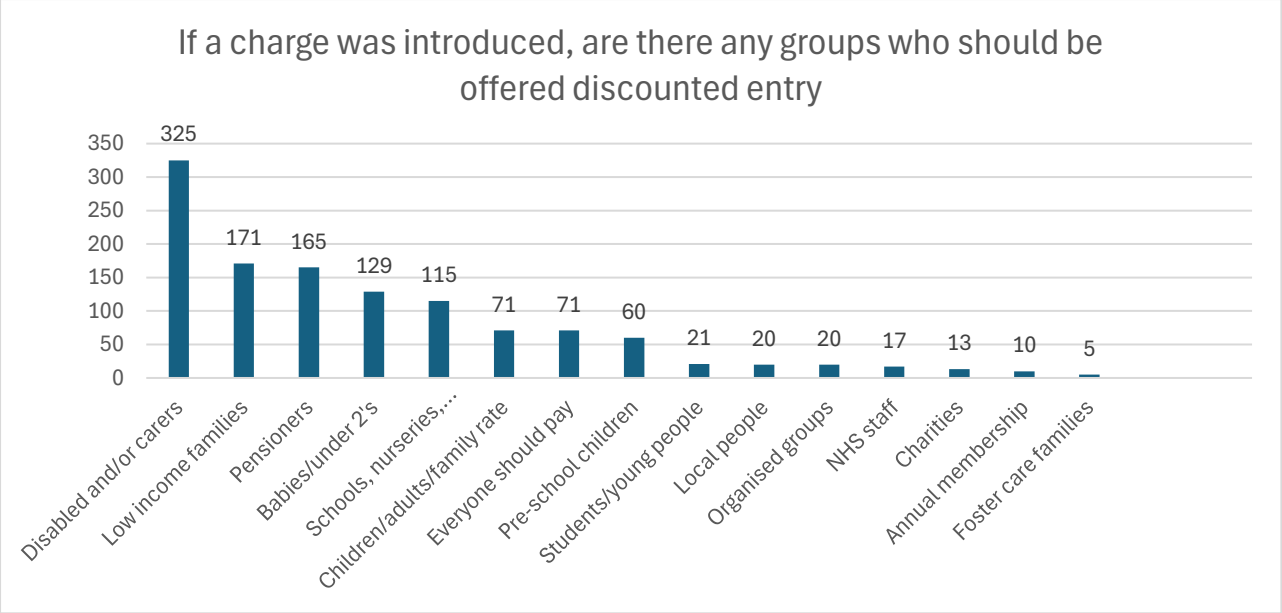


18 people said they would no longer visit the farm if you needed to pay to enter. A further 21 said they currently only visit because it was free to enter and if there was a charge, they'd simply go elsewhere. 42 people were concerned that other people might find an entrance fee unaffordable and would therefore be excluded from visiting with the introduction of an entrance charge. 11 people said they were in this position.

"Inequality is growing in this country. If you introduce a cost for entry, working class families will be excluded and it will become another middle class farm to compete with Old Down, Cattle Country and Noah's Ark etc."

Concessions

The hypothetical around charging for entry was extended to consider whether in this scenario people thought particular groups should be offered concessions.



Groups who are usually offered concessions were identified most often, including disabled people and/or their carers, pensioners and babies and toddlers.

Through the survey disabled people (especially neurodivergent people) and their carers told us how much value they get from visiting the farm. People highlight a range of mental and physical health benefits including social connection, physical activity, stress relief and connection to nature, but a visit to the farm also provides an important respite opportunity for carers. 325 people thought that this group should receive discounted entry. Schools, nurseries and families are the main visitors to the farm and lots of people advocated for some form of discounted pricing when families or large groups were attending together.

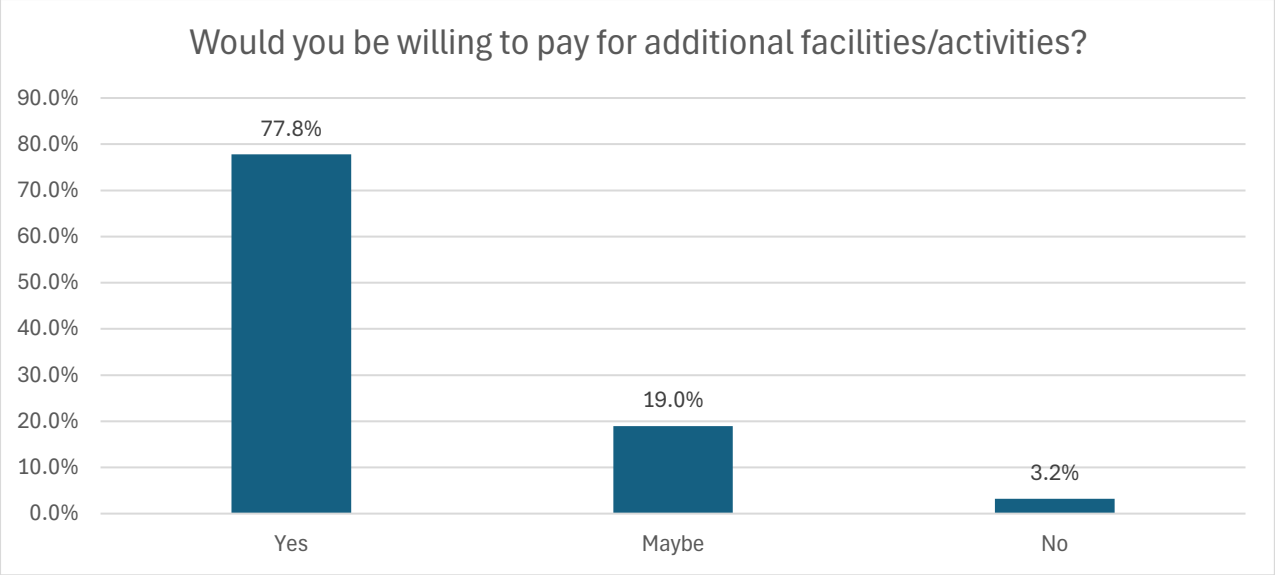
Kingswood's population is relatively less affluent than other parts of South Gloucestershire and 171 people felt that low-income families should be offered discounted entry – several people thought that in the event of an entry fee being introduced, there should be a policy whereby families who couldn't afford entry should be admitted without needing to prove they were reliant on benefits.

71 people felt that everyone should pay the same.

Alternatives to a 'pay as you go' entrance fee

Over three quarters of survey respondents said they would be willing to pay for additional facilities or activities such as feeding animals. Different income-generating opportunities are explored in the next section of the report.

Respondents under 40 were significantly more willing to pay for additional facilities or services (84% vs 77% of 40-60 year-olds and 67% of over-60s). Disabled respondents were slightly less likely to be willing to pay for additional items (67% vs 81% non-disabled respondents).



In comments throughout the survey, people advocated for an annual pass as an alternative to requiring people to pay for entry. This was considered especially beneficial for parents of young children, where it was difficult to know how long they might be able to stay for individual visits. This type of model would also be positive for the organisation running the farm as it would provide greater predictability over income.

As an alternative to the fixed entry fee model, several people wondered if more could be done to encourage donations. At the engagement event on the farm, a high proportion of visitors said they hadn't noticed any donation boxes or any messaging encouraging donation, where they were used to attractions having prominent signage suggesting how much people might donate. Others said that the reliance on cash donations, with no opportunity for electronic payments meant they regularly visited without making a contribution.

> *"It's unfortunate that there was no indication the farm was struggling, or any way for visitors to donate. I'm sure more visitors would have done so had they known and had a simple tap to donate opportunity to do so somewhere near the entrance/exit."*

Running the engagement and raising awareness of the costs of running Grimsbury Farm – and introducing the prospect of charging to enter - has opened up questions about what role the farm is playing and what local people think it could and should be.

What is Grimsbury Farm?

It is clear from the engagement activity that local people have a strong emotional attachment to Grimsbury Farm and what it stands for. It is seen as part of Kingswood's historical identity and a source of great pride. Many people completing the survey told us they had been visiting for many years, first when their children

were young and now with their grandchildren. For this group the priority is to keep the farm as they remember it.

> *"I have been going to this farm since I was a little girl, it would be such a shame to close the doors."*

Others value the current relaxed nature of visiting the farm. People report on the benefits of seeing animals in an informal setting for neurodivergent individuals, young children and those with particular social/communication needs.

However, most people recognise that some changes are needed. In prioritising the future for the farm, there is a divergence in opinion between those who see it primarily as a visitor attraction which should operate following commercial principles versus those for whom it is more a community asset, who want the organisation managing the farm to maximise the social benefits that the farm provides/could provide.

Model 1: The farm as a visitor attraction

Those who see the farm's future as a visitor attraction compare it with other family attractions and identify in the way the farm is currently run several missed opportunities to generate income.

In visiting the farm, people have noticed a great deal of under-utilised space; both outside space and buildings which appear to serve no purpose. They offer numerous suggestions for how the site could be better used to generate additional income – some very ambitious ideas, which would require major new investment, but also some simpler options which are aligned to the current operations as a working farm.

More interaction with the animals: 97% of people completing the survey said they potentially would be willing to pay for additional facilities and activities like feeding the animals. This felt to local people like an under-exploited opportunity for the farm to earn additional income. In conversations with farm visitors, the opportunity to feed/pet animals was one of the biggest draws to the farm, but many people said that the way this was currently being run meant it was not necessarily earning additional money for the farm. At other similar venues people were used to paying for animal encounters/day on the farm experiences, for donkey rides, and schemes to sponsor individual animals.

Birthday parties: In free comments, 39 people thought that there was potential for the farm to earn additional income (and to build closer engagement with local people) by running birthday parties. This would appear an obvious revenue stream given the appeal of the farm to young children. The opportunity to hire part of the venue for a party is promoted on site, but multiple people told us they had enquired about arranging a birthday party at the farm for their children and their friends but had not been responded to and so they'd gone elsewhere.

Seasonal events: Events which had been hosted at the farm at Easter, Halloween and Christmas in previous years were extremely popular with those responding to the engagement, but respondents felt these were not happening as frequently currently. In free comments, 45 people thought that placing greater focus on these as fundraising events could generate significant income.

A 'destination' café: Feedback on the café was mixed. Not everyone appreciated that it was run by Brandon Trust to provide supported employment opportunities for people with Learning Disabilities. A large proportion of the farm's visitors are mums and dads visiting with toddlers and pre-school children. People believed that the farm could attract far more young parents on 'coffee play dates' if the café provided better quality coffee, food and refreshments.

Soft play: Other venues offer facilities like soft play to provide indoor activities for young children when the weather is inclement. Several survey respondents felt that play facilities would need to be improved if people were being asked to pay to enter.

Events venue: Several people believed there was potential revenue to be gained from operating part of the site as an events venue. The suggestions for the types of events were quite varied (and potentially ambitious!), including corporate conference facilities, to yoga classes or exercise boot camps to a wedding venue. Having a car park was seen as a bonus. Respondents representing local councils expressed concern that other local venues, including the rugby club, relied on revenue from being used as a community venue and for private events.

Forest school/educational visits: Though survey respondents didn't see the educational elements of the farm's offering to be as important as other facilities, 21 people suggested that the farm would make a good venue for a forest school and 12 people thought the farm could earn additional income if it did more to encourage educational visits from schools and nurseries. 13 people mentioned the importance of facilities like Grimsbury Farm in educating young people about nature and where their food comes from.

Shop/markets: The farm already offers some produce for sale, but if it were operating as a working farm, people felt there was potential to offer a wider range of produce from either a farm shop, or by using the farm as a venue for a farmer's market. The inclusion of fruit and vegetable gardens would add to its current offering.

Other income-generating ideas included running parts of the site as a campsite or holiday let, offering night-time nature walks or allocating space for craft workshops like pottery and basket weaving. Some people thought allowing food vans to sell on-site could provide income, although clearly, this would compete with the on-site café.

As well as improving facilities, local people see opportunity for the farm to attract more visitors and generate more income if it operated on a more commercial basis, following common sense business principles. Through the survey, respondents told us that there was very little promotion of the farm in local media or on social media and in discussions with farm visitors at the drop-in events, some told us that many of their neighbours, friends and family do not even know the farm exists. Staff working

at the farm had noted a downturn in recent visitor numbers, which they partly attributed to confusion about whether the farm was still open.

Others identified operational improvements, including accepting non-cash payments, better promoting donations and making better use of volunteers as ways of increasing income and reducing costs.

Model 2: Maximising the social value the farm provides

Whilst recognising the financial challenges facing the farm, people didn't want it to become too commercial. They emphasised the positive role the farm has always played in supporting social value initiatives and enhancing local community cohesion and belonging, and they wanted any organisation running the farm in the future to continue and broaden this work.

> *"I strongly believe the site should continue to be used for the benefit of disabled people and families. It has a rich legacy of inclusion, support, and community, and it should not be lost."*

For some people, part of the farm's charm is its small scale. The survey was completed by many parents and carers of people with Special Education Needs and Disabilities (SEND). Parents of people with some disabilities - most notably neurodivergent people - mentioned that having a quiet, calm place where people could see animals was invaluable.

The on-site café is run by the Brandon Trust farm, which operates the site to provide opportunities for people with Learning Disabilities to gain work experience. Several people mentioned how positive it was for their children to see people with disabilities working and asked if there was scope for offering more work-based training on the farm.

> *"I hope you keep doing the volunteering positions for people with disabilities as I think this is such a great opportunity for people who struggle to have somewhere to go and learn new skills. It would be nice to know my local community still supports people like me."*

Others pointed out that the barn had previously been used by a charitable organisation to offer respite facilities for families with children and young adults with special needs and disabilities. Many didn't know what had happened to the charity and asked for a similar facility to be reinstated.

Several organisations operating in the not-for-profit sector visited the site during the engagement drop-in sessions to enquire about opportunities to use part of the farm for their work in the future. Whilst some recognised that they don't have the scale to manage the site on their own, they thought there could be value if several organisations with mutually beneficial priorities could come together on site to form a hub for community support.

Other operating models

In considering the potential future for the farm, 10 people thought the council should partner with an agricultural college to run the site as a training facility for students. Though individual bids from potential partner organisations would need to be considered on their own merit, it is likely that if the farm was being operated by an agricultural college, they would need to restrict opening hours for the public, potentially only outside of course times. In conversations with local people, this kind of restriction to public access would not be acceptable.

One person believed that if the farm model was not financially viable, the land should be instead converted to a park or a playground and another said that part of the site should be sold to a supermarket chain to generate income.

Potential partner organisations

Some respondents used the survey to express their support for a particular organisation to take on management of the farm. The survey was completed by 47 people expressing similar comments advocating the Incredible Kids charity as the best potential partner organisation. This suggests that some organisations ran active campaigns asking their supporters to complete the survey to endorse their bid.

Eight people mentioned the Brandon Trust as the most appropriate partner organisation. Other organisations suggested via the survey were:

- The Edventure Project
- Square Food Foundation
- Jamie's Farm
- Shift Bristol
- Windmill Hill City Farm
- The Food Partnership
- GoatBusters
- Sidmouth Donkey Sanctuary

One person mentioned that in selecting an organisation to manage the farm, it was essential to verify that they had robust financial backing, highlighting an instance where these checks had not been completed.

Other comments, thoughts and suggestions

The engagement identified considerable interest in volunteering. However, with the Friends Group inactive, people weren't sure how they could get involved. It was recognised that dedicated resource was required to network and build relationships with the community and local organisations and to effectively manage offers of volunteering support. Kingswood Town Council and Oldland Parish Council both offered their support in coordinating efforts to bring the community together in support of the farm through volunteering or fundraising.

The background to the engagement focused on the financial challenges facing the farm, but several people used the final comments box to mention new or enhanced facilities they wanted. These included:

- More seating,
- An indoor picnic area,
- Improved parking provision, including for electric vehicles,
- Better play equipment,
- Better toilet facilities,
- More educational signage and animal talks,
- New animals e.g. meerkats,
- Improved fencing and investment in better enclosures,
- A sensory garden,
- Covered walkways.

Clearly, there isn't budget for delivering improvements which are not directly income-generating at this time, but this feedback will be shared with the selected partner organisation for consideration over the longer term.

A handful of people asked about extending the opening hours, either opening on Mondays or staying open later during the week so that older children could visit after school. Again, these changes would have cost implications.

Next steps

This analysis has been produced to help guide the council's decisions about potential partner organisations. In selecting a partner, local people's priorities include:

- Operating the farm as close to its current model as possible,
- Retaining public access is vital – ideally keeping access free of charge or only asking for a nominal entry fee so that all local people can continue to visit,
- Maintaining facilities which are most important to the primary visitor audience. For the farm, this is parents with young children and the facilities/attractions which are most important to them include the range of animals on site, play equipment (ideally with new investment/re-opening access to the barn) and generally maintaining the site as somewhere where toddlers and pre-school children can run around and explore nature,

Additionally, whilst recognising the financial challenges facing the farm, in selecting a potential partner, people do not want it to become too commercial. Instead, they would ideally like it to be managed by an organisation with a local presence, which provides some social value as part of their operating model, and someone who recognises the farm's potential to support contributions of different community groups and charities.

Finally, the learning which comes through strongest through this engagement exercise is just how close an emotional attachment many local people have to the farm. They have been reassured that South Gloucestershire Council is not proposing

to close the site and want to continue to be kept informed and involved in the discussions around the farm's future.

Going forward, they are willing to work with the council, its chosen partner and other stakeholders to build on the farm's previous successes. Many are happy to give up their time as volunteers or to contribute financially through entry charges or donations to keep this much-loved community asset going.

> *"There's only one shot at proving to the public that they've been listened to and that we'll make it right."* **Kingswood Town Council**

Appendix 1: Survey respondents

Our survey sample is not representative of the population of South Gloucestershire, but it is more representative of the visitors to the farm.

