



Isle of Man Government

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Consultation feedback on the future use of the Sulby Claddagh

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Analysis on the future use of Sulby Claddagh Consultation

The Department of Environment, Food and Agriculture launched a consultation to assist with providing a clear way forward for the future use of the Sulby Claddagh.

The consultation was open for 6 weeks from the 18th of April to 26th May 2023 and generated 376 responses. A common criticism of the consultation was the inability to select more than one option. As a result, most respondents used this as an opportunity to state other options in the open textbox as part of the 'Other' option.

The consultation was framed as follows:

The Department will consider all responses and will take a balanced view in formulating a future plan. It is imperative that we find a satisfactory future management option for the Claddagh. However, with its unique status, history and geographical location, the Sulby Claddagh has potential to be enhanced and promoted for the benefit of all. An opportunity exists to ensure the Claddagh maintains and improves upon its 'sense of place'.

Introduction

The Department is seeking the views of the public, Local Authorities and other interested groups on the future use of Sulby Claddagh.

Background

The Sulby Claddagh is situated on the banks of the Sulby River in the Parish of Lezayre. This 16 acre site has played an important part in the life of the village for many centuries and, for many Manx people, holds an enduring affection.

From the early 18th century onwards the site was used for the annual Trinity Fair and, from this association, was referred to locally as the Fairground for many years.

The site, which used to flood regularly, was drained by the excavation and straightening of the Sulby River channel in the 1940s.

Now used primarily for open-air recreation, the Claddagh is popular for dog walking, picnicking, seasonal camping and ball games. It is also a convenient base from which to explore the local footpaths that lead to Mount Carrick, the Sulby valley and beyond.

Over the years, areas of the Claddagh have been zoned to make the best use of space which has included the creation of an arboretum, dedicated recreational area and perimeter walkway.

The Claddagh previously suffered from problems of unacceptable behaviour, which led to the creation of Byelaws in 2002.

These Byelaws have been amended over the years and, amongst other controls, permit overnight camping between May and the end of September. Whilst not an official campsite, camping has become the majority use during the summer months of the site. The Claddagh is particularly popular for this activity during TT fortnight and during the height of summer.

In 2010 the Department reduced the camping season at the Sulby Claddagh from six to five months of the year. At the same time, it implemented a new zoning system to segregate camping from general recreational uses and also introduced a free camping permit system.

In 2011 the Department introduced a seasonal charge for permits which equated to £16 by the 2022 season. This seasonal charge was a one-off fee that enabled the permit holder to camp at the Sulby Claddagh during the season (subject to the Byelaws).

Additionally, in 2020 the Department reviewed its compliance with the Sulby Claddagh Byelaws 2011, the Fire Safety notice for campsites from the Isle of Man Fire Rescue Service and the model standards for campsites.

Operating costs, the condition of the infrastructure and the challenge of maintaining effective controls as camping continues to increase in popularity, balanced against feedback that the level of security and booking process has made the site less appealing to users, has brought about a number of questions on the value and sustainability of the site as it is. Therefore a clear way forward for the future use of Sulby Claddagh remains to be determined and is the subject for this consultation.

History and Legal Status of the Claddagh

Up to 1949, the Claddagh was vested in the Crown and a report of the Crown Receiver in 1911 described it as being *"waste of the manor and is in the same position as the Lord's Forest was prior to the Disafforestation Act 1860"*. By this Act parts of the unenclosed 'forest' were vested absolutely in the Crown *"freed and exonerated and forever discharged from all rights of common, rights of way and from all other rights of what nature or kind soever"*. Other parts of the 'forest' were retained as *"Commoners Allotment"*. As the Claddagh was not included in the land vested absolutely in the Crown under that Act, it has long been considered that the area is still subject to the rights of common which existed before 1860.

The Claddagh was included, however, in the Deed of Conveyance from the Crown and the Commissioners of Crown Lands to the Government Property Trustees in 1949 and all such lands were *"transferred to and vested in the Forestry Board (now Division) by the Forestry, Mines and Lands Act 1950"*.

The current position is that the Claddagh is vested in the Department, subject to the remaining existence of any rights of common over it, similar to those which existed over the unenclosed forest before 1860. The Department has been advised that any pre-1860 rights of common are likely to have been connected with agriculture and, particularly, the right to pasture animals, rather than with activities connected with leisure which did not then exist in their present form.

Further advice received states that activities such as camping could not have been part of the ancient rights of common and, as the Department is the owner of the land, the Department would be entitled to take steps to prevent the Claddagh from being used for unofficial camping.

This advice was sought in 1980 following concerns over the increased level of camping and its effect on use of the land for picnics and similar family recreation. The advice has been revisited at periods since that date and remains relevant.

Since 1980 the Forestry, Mines and Lands Board, and subsequently the Agriculture & Lands Division and the Department, have considered the future status of the Claddagh. However, perhaps due to its contentious nature, no attempt was made to introduce primary legislation to alter the legal status of the site. This is, in part, due to a public notice issued in 1981 which advised that camping on the Claddagh was not an activity authorised by the then Board. This raised considerable newspaper and other public comment and resulted in a mini-debate in the House of Keys on 3rd March 1981. The Board decided to take no further action at that time and continued to monitor the level of camping. This situation has persisted ever since, with a new toilet block being constructed in 1986.

Sulby Claddagh Byelaws

As previously stated, the Department introduced Byelaws in 2002, subsequently amended in 2010 & 2011, which targeted specific practices which had given rise to concern. These are:

- Fires and the use of barbecue equipment;
- Long stay camping;
- Disturbance by noise;
- Prohibition of vehicles other than for access for camping/parking;
- Advertisement of vehicles for sale;
- Control of dogs.

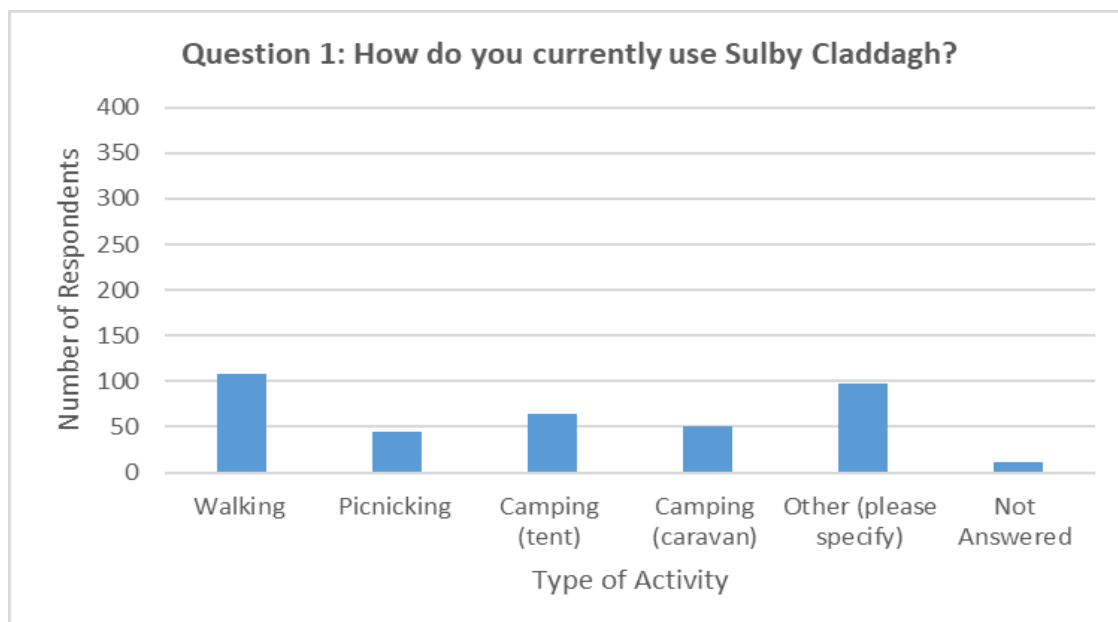
Consultation Results

The Department has given significant thought in recent years to finding the best way of managing the Sulby Claddagh, and has sought the experiences, views and thoughts from our community.

The results of the consultation were as follows:

Question 1

How do you currently use Sulby Claddagh? (364 participated respondents)



Option	Total	Percent
Walking	108	28.72%
Picnicking	44	11.70%
Camping (tent)	64	17.02%
Camping (caravan)	51	13.56%
Other (please specify)	97	25.80%
Not Answered	12	3.19%

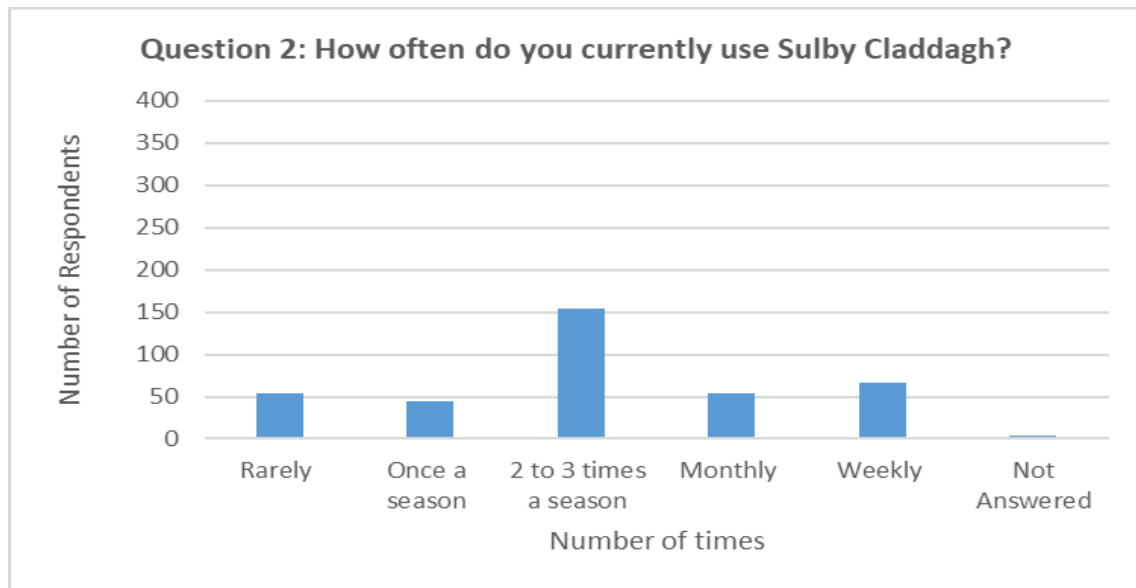
There were 97/25.8% respondents who selected the 'Other' option, although there were 144/39.5% respondents that used the 'Other' open textbox. Some respondents have entered other activities including:

- Motorhomes and campervans 75/20% respondents
- Dog walking 6/1.6% respondents
- Cycling 3/0.8% respondents
- Social gatherings 4/1.1% respondents
- Nature based activities 5/1.3% respondents
- Drive through and parking 8/2.1% respondents
- Horse Riding 3/0.8% respondents

3/0.8% respondents have stated issues over current regulation of the site. It was criticised by approximately 35/9.3% that the questions did not allow multiple choice, which resulted in the increased use of the options section to state a mixture or all the options within the question.

Question 2

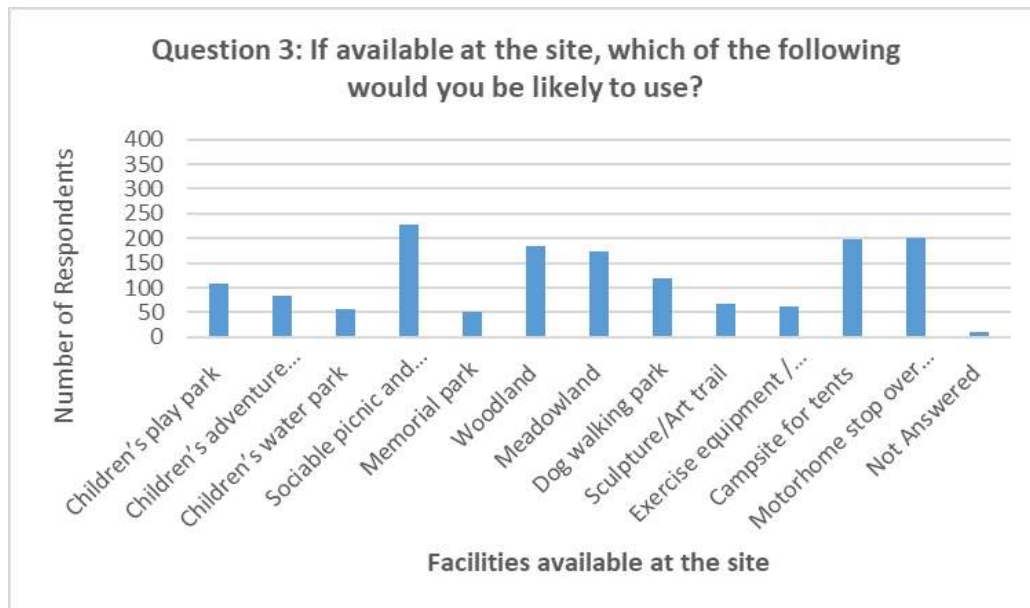
How often do you currently use Sulby Claddagh? (372 participated respondents)



Option	Total	Percent
Rarely	54	14.36%
Once a season	44	11.70%
2 to 3 times a season	154	40.96%
Monthly	54	14.36%
Weekly	66	17.55%
Not Answered	4	1.06%

Question 3

*If available at the site, which of the following would you be likely to use?
(366 participated respondents)*



Option	Total	Percent
Children's play park	107	28.46%
Children's adventure park	84	22.34%
Children's water park	57	15.16%
Sociable picnic and BBQ area	228	60.64%
Memorial park	51	13.56%
Woodland	184	48.94%
Meadowland	173	46.01%
Dog walking park	119	31.65%
Sculpture/Art trail	67	17.82%
Exercise equipment / area	61	16.22%
Campsite for tents	197	52.39%
Motorhome stop over park	200	53.19%
Not Answered	10	2.66%

Question 4

*Do you have any ideas about what else you might like to see at the site?
(209 participated respondents)*

This question was an open textbox, the most common themes are represented below.

A mixed range of responses have been represented by the Manx public on their ideas for the Sulby Claddagh site.

New toilets, shower blocks and waste and water facilities for drinking and washing purposes were the most common suggestions, around 60/16% respondents felt that it was crucial for campers to have access to these basic facilities.

34/9% respondents have requested for the site to remain the same for nostalgic purposes and the ability to simply be able to camp on the site; although no indication from any respondent of what charge they would be prepared to pay. 19/5.1% respondents would like the site to remain open as a public site for children and families, community events and those carrying out daily recreational activities. Approximately 25/6.7% respondents believe that the site should keep the natural state but enhanced to showcase different types of flora i.e. garden area.

There were suggestions for additional features to the site including:

- Children's Park/amusement 5/1.3% respondents
- Shop 6/1.6% respondents
- Café 7/1.9% respondents
- Hireable pods 2/0.5% respondents
- Fire pits 4/1.1% respondents
- Improved signage for tourist 6/1.6% respondents
- Changing the surface and layout of the car parking 3/0.8%

respondents

9 respondents have suggested that the site should accommodate electric hook ups, like the facilities provided in Nobles Park.

3/0.8% respondents suggested for the recruitment of a site warden, while 4/1.1% respondents believe the site should be leased out to a private campsite enterprise.

9/2.4% respondents have requested for there to be either fewer or no caravans on the site.

6/1.6% respondents have requested for more caravan pitches as they believe that 25 pitches are not enough.

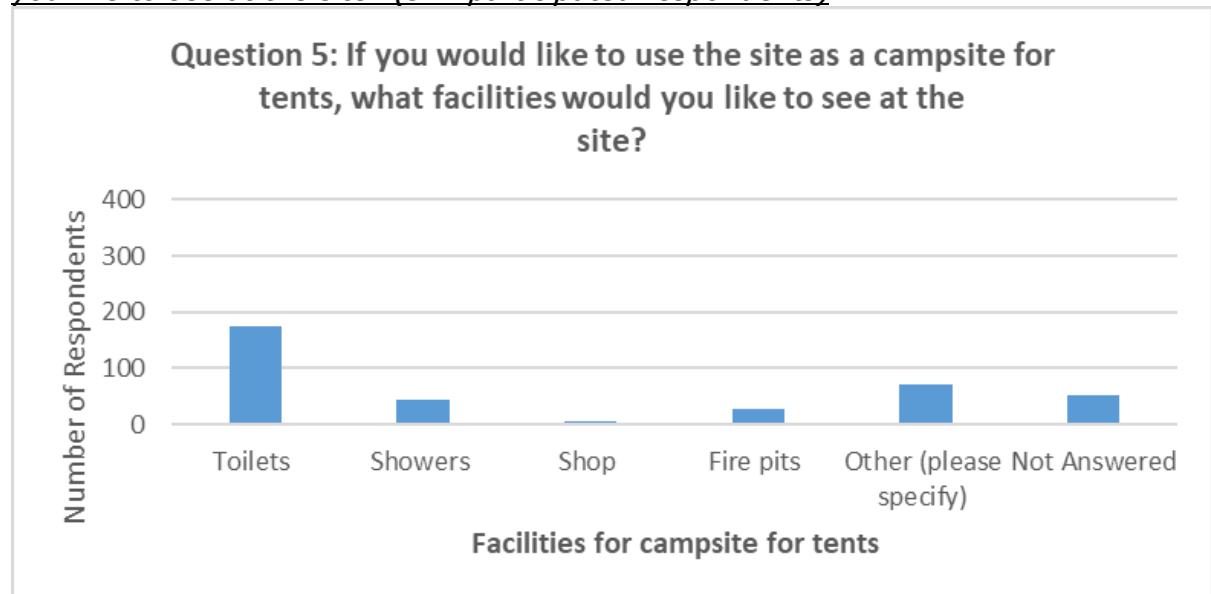
There have been concerns raised by 4/1.1% respondents around the current cost of a permit and some are worried that the prices are increasing, which impacts those with a lower socio-economic status and use the site as a holiday opportunity.

7/1.9% respondents found that the site has too many rules and regulations and therefore limits the freedom of the users.

4/1.1% respondents were against the thought of the site becoming a dog park, as there is potential that it could damage the atmosphere on the site. They are content with the site allowing general dog walking, but they do feel it requires additional bins for dog waste.

Question 5

If you would like to use the site as a campsite for tents, what facilities would you like to see at the site? (324 participated respondents)



Option	Total	Percent
Toilets	175	46.54%
Showers	45	11.97%
Shop	6	1.60%
Fire pits	28	7.45%
Other (please specify)	70	18.62%
Not Answered	52	13.83%

There were 70/18.6% respondents who selected the 'Other' option, although there were 173/53.4% respondents that used the 'Other' open textbox.

Most common suggestions that appeared included:

- Toilets and showers 88/23.4% respondents
- Fire pits 33/8.8% respondents
- Shops 16/4.3% respondents
- Waste/ water facilities 10/2.7% respondents

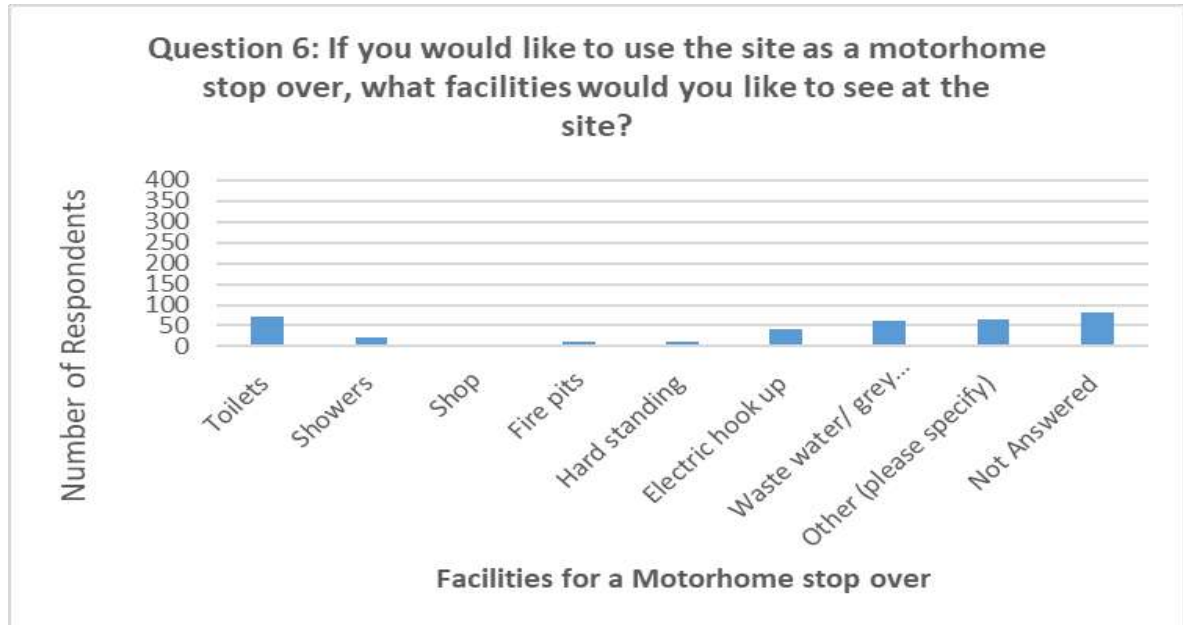
39/10.4% respondents used it to select all the options stated within the question.

Approximately 15/4% respondents strongly believe that the site should not be used for any form of camping.

6/1.6% respondents oppose the idea of a shop, due to a convenience shop already situated within the village (within the Sulby Glen Hotel).

Question 6

If you would like to use the site as a motorhome stop over, what facilities would you like to see at the site? (293 participated respondents)



Option	Total	Percent
Toilets	72	19.15%
Showers	23	6.12%
Shop	5	1.33%
Fire pits	13	3.46%
Hard standing	12	3.19%
Electric hook up	43	11.44%
Waste water/ grey water facilities	61	16.22%
Other (please specify)	64	17.02%
Not Answered	83	22.07%

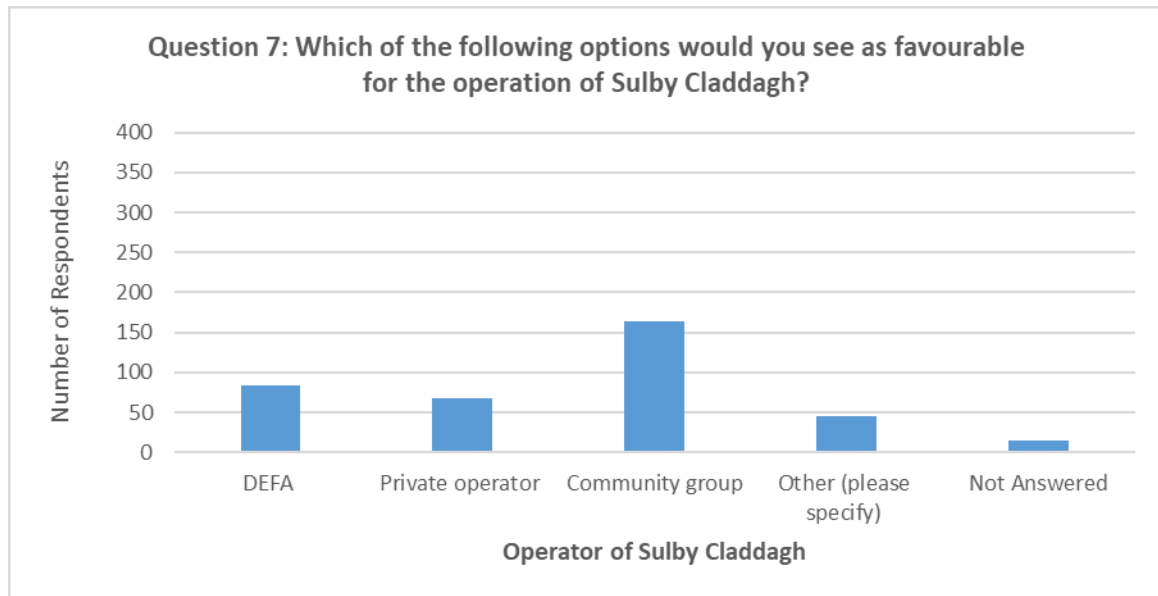
There were 64 / 21.8% respondents who selected the 'Other' option, although there were 137/46.7% respondents that used the 'Other' open textbox.

Approximately 100/26.7% respondents have requested all the options stated within the question, toilets and showers, waste/ water facilities, fire pits, and electric hook up points.

It was suggested by 30/8% respondents for there to be no motorhomes/campervans on the site.

Question 7

Which of the following options would you see as favourable for the operation of Sulby Claddagh? (361 participated respondents)



Option	Total	Percent
DEFA	84	22.34%
Private operator	67	17.82%
Community group	164	43.62%
Other (please specify)	46	12.23%
Not Answered	15	3.99%

There were 46 / 12.2% respondents who selected the 'Other' option, although there were 87/24.1% respondents that used the 'Other' open textbox.

Approximately 30/8% respondents believe that it should not be run by the Isle of Government and have suggested that it should be operated by Community groups, private operators, Commissioners or Local Authorities.

Approximately 25/6.7% respondents argue that it must be provided solely for public use, as some have associated it with the common rights principle.

Collaborative approach with DEFA overseeing the site with either a community group or private operator doing the day-to-day duties was suggested by 9/2.4% respondents. 10/2.7% respondents believe that the Manx Wildlife Trust, Manx National Heritage, or a similar organisation with appropriate experience to operate the infrastructure on the site.

Question 8

Do you have any other comments or suggestions? (219 participated responses)

The following themes have been represented in the comments and suggestions:

Keeping the site open was a common theme recognised by 30/14% respondents, for nostalgic reasons camping and or daytime recreation provision. It was recognised by

20/5.3% respondents that children and families are common users of the site, it is recognised as a family safe environment and an opportunity for everyone to connect to the outdoors. 20/5.3% respondents felt that the site should be left alone to support the natural environment, which is appreciated by many.

10/2.7% respondents found that tourism and commercial purposes is significantly associated with the site, it was recognised that the site supports the Island economy by attracting more visitors / tourists especially during the TT period. Some suggested that there could be further branding developed for the site, to make it a success story with further investments and business plans. It was strongly believed that the camping season supported the wider community - shop, pubs, and busses, who all benefited from the site's operation as a campsite, which in turn benefited the wider visitor economy. It was recognised by 20/5.3% respondents that existing local community camping groups and/or private enterprises are in the best position to operate the site, as they understand the needs and requirements of campers. Around 10/2.7% respondents have recommended the for the site to be leased by a private organisation1 respondent suggested a unique idea involving engagement between the local businesses around the site to contribute towards the enhancement and repairs on the site.

There were concerns by 15/4% respondents around the increase in permit prices, as some families use the site as a more affordable holiday destination. There are assumptions and concerns that the site will incur further changes and therefore increase the camping permit costs. With the increased application of regulations on the site this may decrease the usability and attractiveness for the families that use the site.

Approximately 40/10.6% respondents suggested that the permit system could be improved. The cost of the permit is perceived to be high for a range of reasons especially due to current increased costs of living. Some people feel they only use it a couple of times and the site does not have the facilities of a standard campsite. The length of stay and checks conducted on the permits were suggested to be reviewed. There were recommendations for a new booking system on the website to make it more user friendly, as well as a clear cancellation policy. It was suggested to review the byelaws, specifically

to increase the number of pitches allowed and the period permitted to use the site.

Approximately 40/10.6% respondents have requested for improvements to the site, which involve the inclusion of toilets and shower blocks, more waste facilities, a kiosk and recruiting a campsite warden to improve the camping experience.

5/1.3% respondents are against leasing the site to a private operator as they find that the site has a distinctive style opposed to other existing campsites. They believe that a private operator should not use the site for commercial gain and there may be a lack of resilience and accountability.

Approximately 15/4% respondents believe that the site should be available to all types of camping, which could increase the multifunctional purposes of the site and raise income by charging for the camping services and amenities i.e., pay-meters for motorhomes.

According to 20/5.3% respondents the requirement for 24 hours security was believed to have been unnecessary. There seems to be mixed views around the anti-social behaviour on the site, some believe that there are no issues, while others find that the levels of anti-social behaviour could be dealt with by the police or an on-site warden and therefore security is not required. The respondents have concerns around high expenses required for security and that their roles are believed to be unnecessary.

Approximately 20/5.3% respondents raised their concerns around the anti-social behaviour on the site. They felt that they are unable to enjoy their experience due to a small number of people. Examples of antisocial behaviour included alcohol or drug misuse, noise, dog fouling, littering, and driving above the speed limit through the site. There were suggestions to bring in some level of enforcement towards members of the public who are unable to act in a civilised and responsible manner. Examples of enforcement recommended included penalties, banning, or removing permits, penalties / fines for anti-social behaviour, speed limits on cars or installing CCTV cameras.