



# Portobello Golf Course

## Edinburgh Leisure

### Survey Findings June 2019

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## Background

The survey forms an integral part of an 'Outcome Improvement Process' which was agreed between Portobello Golf Club, Portobello Community Council, Edinburgh Leisure and the Council. It was decided that a survey would be a way in which people would be asked for their opinions.

Both the Council and Edinburgh Leisure worked with Portobello Golf Course Action Group and Portobello Community Council to develop a public survey to gauge views on increasing the use of Portobello Golf Course. Both community groups contributed to the content and wording of the survey and agreement was reached on the approach by all parties prior to the start of the consultation.

## Aim

The survey asks people what they think about Portobello Golf Course and how it could be changed to increase the numbers of people visiting; and to widen its appeal to everybody including young people, families and older people so that the whole community can benefit and make use of the open space.

The survey commenced on Tuesday 23rd April 2019 and was promoted at Portobello Golf Course, Portobello Library, Portobello High School, Tumbles and Portobello Swim Centre with paper copies available as well as the online version on the Council's Consultation Hub.

The online version closed on Friday 10<sup>th</sup> May. All paper copies sent by post were included up to and including May 16<sup>th</sup> to allow for any delays in these copies being received.

The survey, results and findings are the responsibility of the Council's Strategy and Communications Division and all responses were independently analysed. This report has been prepared by a senior member of the Policy and Insight team.

## Survey Approach

The survey consisted of six questions designed to seek the views of local people, both golfers and non-golfers, about Portobello Golf Course as it is currently and sought feedback on ideas to improve visitor numbers. The survey was designed to be as straightforward and easy to respond to as possible with the opening question asking whether the respondent knew of the course. Further questions were asked around levels of golfing experience; how regularly respondents visited the course and for their reasons why they decided to play or not play there.

The survey then asked respondents to select from a list of options of golf-related activities that they themselves thought would attract more people to the facility. The survey provided options for respondents to add their own comments and suggestions.

## Response to survey

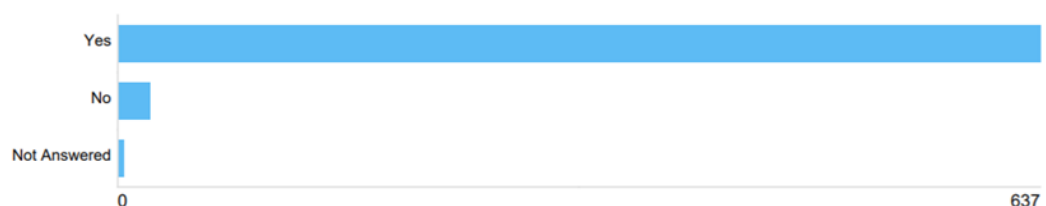
662 participants took part in the survey. In total, 644 provided their age. The majority (59%) of individuals were aged between 45 and 74, while a further 25% were between 24 and 44. The smallest proportion was for individuals aged under 24.

43% of respondents were female and 57% were male.

## Knowledge of the course

The survey asked respondents *if they knew of the course* at Portobello. Most respondents were aware of the course (see chart below). 22 respondents said they had not known there was a course at Portobello and there are varying levels of understanding as to what the golf course has to offer.

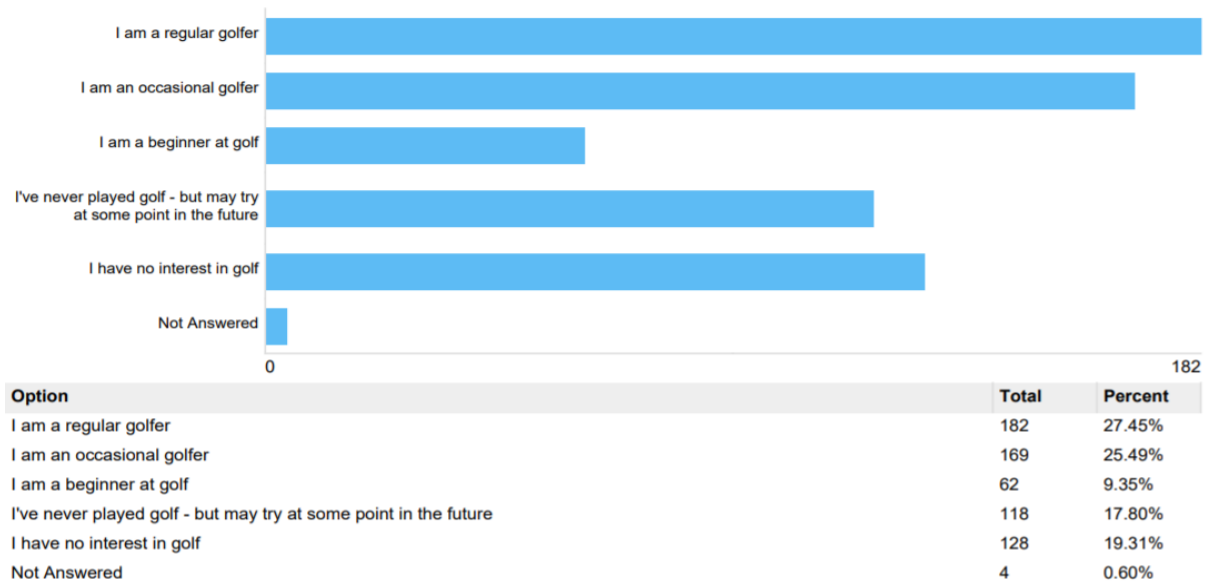
**Knowledge of Golf Course**



## Golfing experience

The survey asked about the respondent's *experience at golf*. Regular and occasional golfers made up most respondents (53%). Beginners were just over 9%. Almost 18% expressed an interest in possibly trying out the sport at some point in the future.

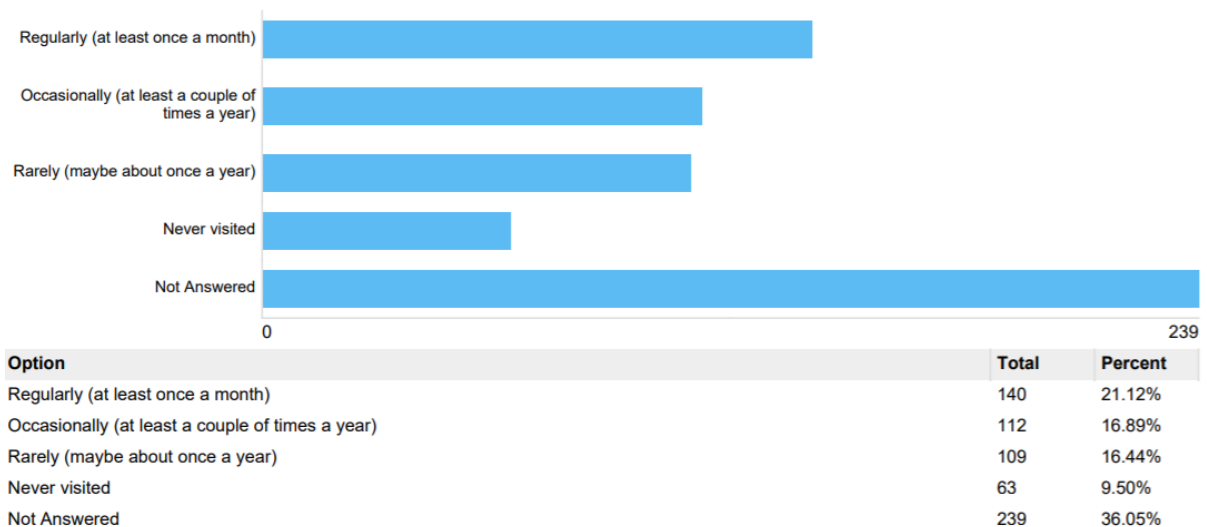
*We would like to know about your golfing experience*



## Regularity of visits

Respondents were asked *how often they visited the course* (see chart below). Just over a fifth (21%) attend the course regularly; 17% visited at least twice a year; and 16% visited rarely and almost 10% of respondents said they had never visited. The final third declined to answer.

*How often do you visit Portobello Golf Course to play golf?*



## Reasons for playing

Just over half of respondents provided reasons for choosing to play regularly at the course. Being close to Portobello and easy to walk to is of great benefit for locals. Differing views on the value for money aspects of the course with some feeling it is uncompetitively priced compared to other similar courses.

Reasons included having a past connection with the course such as learning to play golf as a youngster to highlighting the ability to save time with just 9-holes and the accessibility and ease of play being a flatter course. This suits people with mobility issues or recovering from an injury or medical treatment. Being easy for beginners and for children encourages adults to teach younger ones and entices those wanting to begin to learn without too much of an initial challenge.

The excellent views of the city, the relaxation it provides and the bonus of being away from traffic offers a 'space to escape' and with much complimented helpful and approachable staff this all adds to the course's overall appeal.

## Reasons for not playing

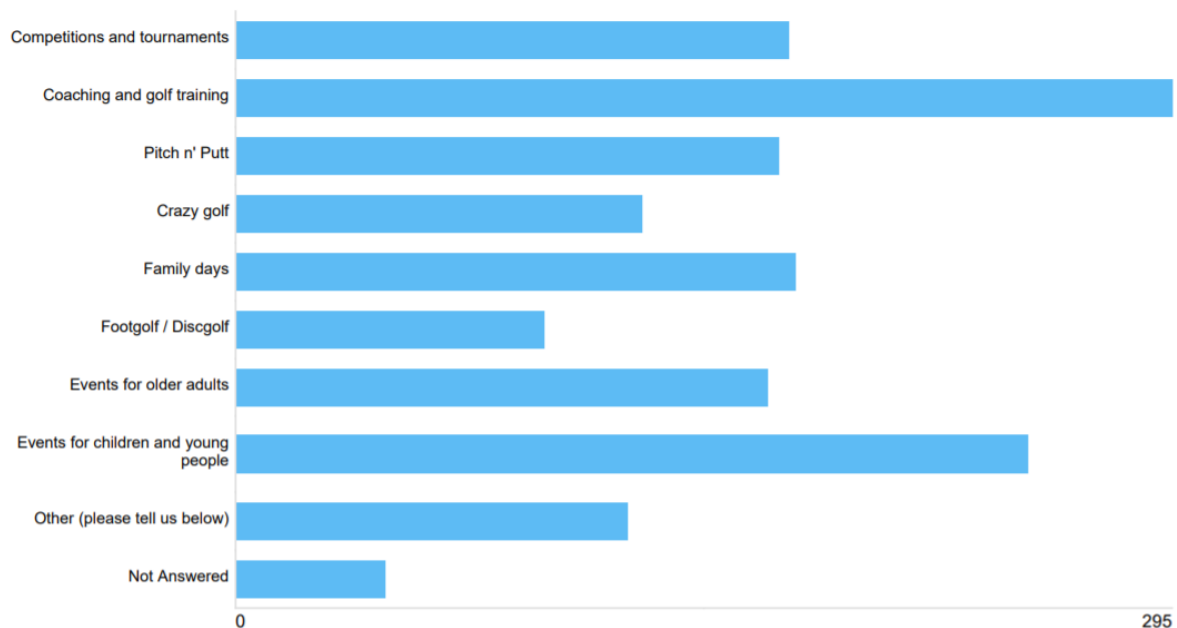
Just under 10% of all respondents gave direct feedback as to why they did not play more regularly at the course. The reasons for deciding not to play included having a membership elsewhere or better courses being available; not knowing the course existed and a feeling it somewhat undersells itself.

Distance can be prohibitive, as was a lack of interest in golf and being concerned as a novice holding up others on the course. Some people simply said that they did not have enough time and their kids were too young. The lack of golfing equipment can be restricting as are reasons around personal health.

## Activities to attract more people

People were asked about suggestions for activities that would attract more people to the golf course (see chart below). Coaching and golf training received the most support from almost half of all respondents (45%) with events for children and young people just behind with 38%. Support for competitions and tournaments, pitch n' putt, family days and events for older adults attracted the support of around one-quarter of all respondents. 19% of respondents used the option to provide other suggestions both golf and non-golf related. 7% provided no response to this question.

*We want to discover what sort of golf related activities would bring more people to the facility*



Option	Total	Percent
Competitions and tournaments	174	26.24%
Coaching and golf training	295	44.49%
Pitch n' Putt	171	25.79%
Crazy golf	128	19.31%
Family days	176	26.55%
Footgolf / Discgolf	97	14.63%
Events for older adults	167	25.19%
Events for children and young people	249	37.56%
Other (please tell us below)	123	18.55%
Not Answered	48	7.24%

## Summary of findings

Portobello Golf Course is clearly an important and popular open space within the community for many people. Both golfers and non-golfers supporting the importance of retaining the space and keeping much of it as it is – describing it as natural, unique in character and a very important geographical and historical landmark for the local people who see it as an important community asset.

The course attracts people from across Edinburgh and beyond and its location is treasured with impressive views of the city and its relaxing, relatively easy to play 9-holes.

There are mixed views about what would improve visitor numbers and how the space should be used. Regular golf members and groups passionately want to retain the space for the sport of golf, but not everyone wants to see the space used as it currently is; with many seeking an alternative vision for the space. Ideas range from keeping the status quo and protecting the golfing heritage of the course, to re-imagining its use potentially as a wider sports amenity. Some suggest a mixed approach, offering a new and improved overall golfing experience combined with improvements to facilities.

There is a desire to connect and engage with younger players through a golfing academy or the establishing of a golfing programme designed for local schools. The course is acknowledged as an excellent course for beginners and there is genuine positivity around getting younger people more involved; but this should be balanced with protecting the interests of existing loyal regular users who cherish their existing access to the course.

Historically, the course dates back over one hundred years and many of the regular golfers respect its heritage having long-held fond memories of this '*local gem of a course*'. There are concerns that they may lose the facility or that it will be '*re-imagined*' possibly beyond recognition so that current regulars felt unable to attend.

The thought of the course offering a wider array of golfing related events such as *Discgolf* or *Footgolf* is viewed as short-term and tokenistic by some and would not provide a long-term solution. However, it was recognised that to be sustainable going forward the golf course offerings will need to change.

Regular golfers of the course tend to support and encourage tournaments, golf-coaching, pitch n' putt and family days whilst expressing concerns about the cost being too expensive to entice beginners, and there are clear differences in opinion as to the overall quality and upkeep of the course. Some feel the course is relatively well maintained and offers excellent value for money, whilst others are conversely much more critical saying the course requires more attention and is less well looked after. The clubhouse at the course is seen as requiring an upgrade and there are opportunities to improve the interior to make it more appealing and welcoming.



## Themes

The main recurrent themes emerging from across the open-ended survey responses fell into these six broad categories: -

1. Affordability
2. Accessibility
3. Use of the space
4. Fear of closure
5. Publicity and marketing
6. General improvements

### 1. Affordability

There were clear differences in opinion between golfers and non-golfers as to the overall affordability of Portobello Golf Course ranging from offering great value for money to a feeling that the prices are somewhat unreasonable and excessive.

For those not interested in golf, cost is a particularly prohibitive factor for them; more especially for people who are on a low income. Generally, the cost of a non-season ticket holder to use the course was felt to be non-competitive compared to other courses (both Council-owned and private) and that this may be preventing take-up by those keen to learn or give golf a try.

A common perception with non-golfers is that golf is an expensive sport in general and the entrance costs of the course are felt to reflect this, being in their opinion somewhat pricey in terms of the overall affordability and comparison to similar clubs including those offering the full 18-holes, both private and those which are Council-owned.

### 2. Accessibility

The convenience and proximity of the course for local golfers is also a great benefit, particularly for older players. This group also found the 9-hole offering more appealing than a traditional 18-hole course. The course is generally flatter than most others and this again means it is attractive to those less able to play on a more challenging course.

The course was also seen to help people maintain personal fitness and have positive impacts on the effects of loneliness for many regular golfers. In this respect the course goes some way to address the negative effects of social isolation.

### 3. Use of the space

Encouraging young people would make the course more popular especially long term. Due to the proximity of the course to the school it would make sense for it to be used by pupils as a golf academy or for golf training to encourage younger people into the sport – some going as far to suggest including golf within the school curriculum.

Offering a range of fun activities centred around the golfing theme (and possibly some non-golfing) may encourage families to participate and might give children a positive learning experience. Term time junior coaching and summer golf camps for kids with golfing open days should also be offered. Again, the nature of the course lends itself to being perfect for youngsters and beginners of the sport as well as older people.

The complete change of use of the site – shifting away from use as primarily a golf course – also tended to come from those who also expressed that they have no interest in the sport; and from others who have no desire to try golf as a sport at any time in the future.

Those respondents who expressed little or no interest in golf provided a range of ideas as to how the course could be better utilised. The course is appreciated as an excellent greenspace for walking around as well as a very safe environment and the benefits of enhancing nature and bio-diversity was considered as a more productive and natural use of the space. It was felt there are already plenty of courses available within the city and that the course should be made more appealing for the greater good of the community and those conversely expressing that it is very under-utilised, often empty and therefore a 'waste of space'.

There was also the potential to radically transform the space by creating in its place non-golfing choices such as a nature reserve. There is a perception, particularly by those who live close to the course that it is not used that much and that it might serve a better purpose as for example a local park for the benefit of everyone in the community – the idea of having a skatepark was also mooted.

There is a sense that greenspace in general is diminishing fast in Portobello with the recent housing developments and the construction of the new high school. The benefits of bio-diversity and the importance of climate change were highlighted as justification for a move away from the golf-centred approach for use of the space.

There was also strong support for the potential to create a 'Portobello Sports Village' at the site 'continue the recent work in Portobello of bringing spaces back into the community to the benefit of a wider group of people who would previously have used the land'.

The community asset transfer process was cited as the potential route towards achieving this proposal. It is felt that several local sport and community groups could come together to provide different opportunities for people to be involved in a space which is at the centre of Portobello and the surrounding area with the opportunity for the neighbouring high school to use the facilities as school rolls continue to grow across the city.

Within this proposal it was suggested to retain the golf course but reduce it to a 6-hole offering alongside both indoor and outdoor facilities for local rugby, football, basketball, hockey and other teams to use. The aspiration being that these community-based facilities are run by local clubs which have proved successful in Edinburgh in recent years – examples provided included Inch Park Sports Club and Spartans FC.

## 4. Fear of closure

There is concern that the course will be closed and in particular the land sold off for housing provision following the amount of such developments in the last few years within Portobello and the effect of housing growth on local services. Many respondents want it to remain a green area for community use.

There is a mistrust that the consultation is simply a '*paper exercise*' and the '*real plan is to close the course*'. The feelings of uncertainty around the future of the course have been further exacerbated due to the handling of communications, with consultation timings being criticised. There is amongst some a sense of mistrust around proceedings being in the genuine interests of the public and a hope that future decisions will properly reflect community needs and desires.

It was suggested that Edinburgh Leisure fully investigate and evaluate the value the course currently provides the community and that any change proposed is appropriately balanced between cost pressures and possible medium and long-term social consequences.

Also, the continued uncertainty over the future of the course is causing some regular members to delay season ticket renewals.

## 5. Publicity and marketing

Again, the issue of advertising and the promotion of the course was cited as weak and at times somewhat non-existent. There is also considered to be a lack of physical signage local to the course and a perception that the course continues to lack a proper marketing strategy to help it be sustainable and successful. The course could be marketed as a visitor attraction for tourists who want a break from the business of the city centre.

Open days, family days and fun days which are organised with the local community will help raise the profile of the course with discounted coaching sessions aimed at encouraging young people to take up golf whilst green fees should be free for all under 12's and junior memberships should be re-instated.

Using social media and having a concerted marketing campaign was felt to be much needed and the club should be promoted across the city. The focus of one dedicated individual who is tasked with promoting and developing the course would also be advantageous.

## 6. General improvements

The possibility of providing clubs for hire and additional improved lockers would entice more people to walk to the club and encourage active lifestyles. The provision of food and drinks and the use of the clubhouse as a social area to gather might increase the ability for other communities of interest to come to the course.

Incidents of fly-tipping around the golf course appear to be increasing and this needs to be attended to as would small improvements to the bunkers and greens. The overall appearance of the course can influence more irregular golfers who are used to other courses.