

AROS WATERFRONT REGENERATION PUBLIC CONSULTATION

THA and the Consultation Process

As a community organisation, Tobermory Harbour Association (THA) continues to adhere to the principle that involvement of the local community in the planning stages of this project is essential. In order to develop the most successful project, the THA has endeavoured to not only inform and consult, but have actively involved a wide range of local audiences in the development of the project. Over time we have therefore used a range of methods and activities to reach as much of the community as possible. The hope is that this has not only enabled local residents to play an important role in the planning and initial decision-making process but, assuming a successful purchase of the property, will also provide a basis for the delivery stages further down the line.

Practice by the THA in other areas of its work shows that communication and distribution of information in the early stages are key to gaining support for projects in the end and that regular communication over the project lifetime from a variety of sources ensures more people will be reached and become involved at some stage, providing a good level of community ownership of the project over time.

Process Pre-2017

To support the above practice, to gauge support for the regeneration, and to consider what facilities and amenities this may include, various media have been used to promulgate the Aros Waterfront Project. These include articles in the local press, Facebook updates and announcements, posters in public places, leaflets, and the THA website. An online survey, with paper copies of the survey in the local shops was also undertaken to identify levels of support, any gaps, priorities and preferences and some of the most appropriate options for the regeneration project going forward.

From the widespread consultation process prior to June 2016 a series of potential development options emerged and the THA commissioned EKOS Consultants Ltd (<http://www.ekos-consultants.co.uk>) to use the findings of the survey and consultations to undertake an Options Review for the proposed regeneration.

The EKOS Options Review was published in August 2016. It noted in particular that THA had consulted with the following agencies and organisations:

- Argyll & Bute Council;
- Mull Community Council;
- Mull & Iona Community Trust;
- Tobermory Endeavour;
- Mull Wildlife & Horticultural Society; and
- North West Mull Community Woodland Company.

The EKOS Report is appended to the SLF application with this consultation report.

Subsequent to the report further assessments of the site and development options were undertaken. In 2017 the officer responsible for taking the project forward left her post and it was decided by the THA Borad to concentrate *pro tem* on other harbour development priorities.

Consultation June 2018

In 2018 the Aros purchase was brought back to FCS and the SLF.

In order to verify the continuing approval of the community for the project, and to ensure that the public remained as participants in the process, in June 2018 another survey was put on Survey Monkey.com and Mull-specific Facebook pages were used to invite people to give their views. Not everyone uses social media, and some people require more detail and discussion before participation in this kind of consultation, so there was also a drop-in event held in the Aros hall in Tobermory which was widely advertised both on social media and by posters displayed at various prominent public sites. Paper copies of the survey were also placed in local shops.

A summary of the THA Aros Waterfront Regeneration Project was provided as explanation for the survey as follows:

Tobermory Harbour Association (THA) has been offered a one off and unique opportunity to purchase Aros Park pier and its surrounds, including the former boathouse and sawmill buildings from Forestry Commission Scotland. The historically important Aros Park waterfront area has suffered from neglect and under-use for many years, so this purchase would give the THA an opportunity to preserve these assets for the community, retaining their heritage for future generations and, over time, sensitively regenerate the area as a community resource.

If the THA don't buy this land, the Forestry Commission may sell to a private developer, leaving the community with little opportunity to have a say as to the future of this area.

It is important that the THA's plans for purchase are justifiable, achievable and sustainable. While there is no immediate requirement to provide precise details of any long-term developments, an indicative business plan does need to be provided. We would therefore be grateful for feedback from residents of Tobermory, Mull and around, and regular visitors who use Aros Park.

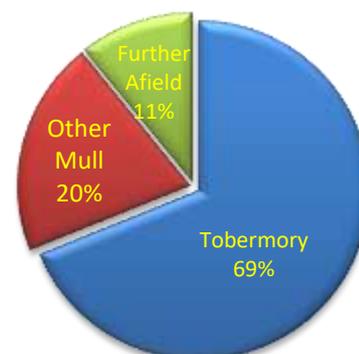
There were 168 responses to the questionnaire in total. The findings are as follows:

Q.1 Where do you live?

Our aim was primarily to get the opinions of the community served by the THA.

115 people, or almost 70% of respondents, lived in Tobermory and 149 people (89%) in total were from Mull.

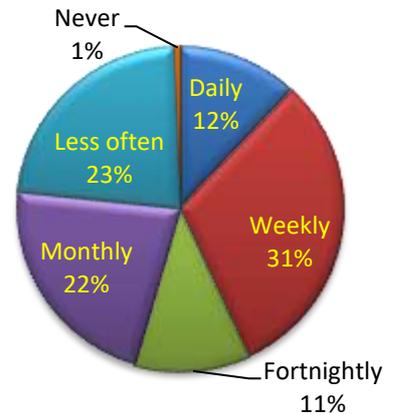
It is interesting that 11% of people came from outside Mull, suggesting a strong interest in the affairs of the island from people who had visited Mull at some stage. This is particularly relevant in the context of regeneration designed to enhance the tourism offer of Tobermory.



Q2. How often do you visit Aros park?

For many respondents the Park is an integral part of their lives. Given that it is over a mile from the main residential areas of Tobermory, 43% find time to visit at least once a week, a majority (54%) visit once a fortnight or more, and over three-quarters visit at least once a month.

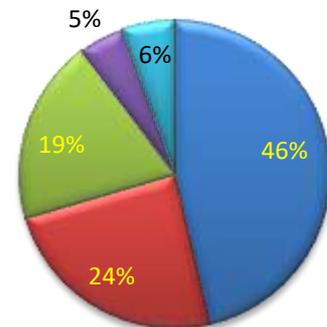
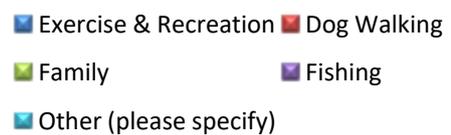
This suggests that the Park in general serves a vital and much appreciated role in supporting the health and well-being of people. It is a valuable community resource.



Q3. What do you visit Aros park for?

This question was designed to get a picture of existing use of the Park.

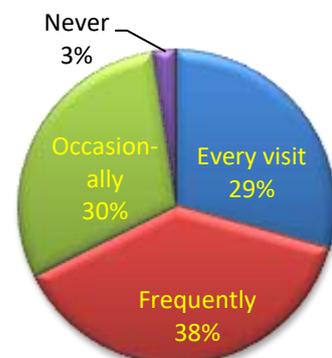
The greatest number of people (46%) describe themselves as using it simply for exercise and recreation, but in general it is seen by everyone as an outlet for relaxation in an open environment, be it for exercise, dog walking or spending time with the family.



Q4. How often do you visit the pier & waterfront area?

This question was designed to provide a sense of how relevant the pier and waterfront area are to users of the Park.

Given the size of the Park, its different points of access, different opportunities for recreation around the whole estate, and the relative effort needed to access the waterfront, a high number of people take the opportunity to visit this area. A significant 67% visit frequently or every visit.



Q5. Do you think the THA should purchase the Aros Park Waterfront?

On the simple question of whether to purchase or not, an encouraging 71%, 118 people, said 'yes'.

Only 12%, or 20 people, disagreed with the purchase, whilst 17% were undecided. The latter figure may well reflect the fact that no firm decision has yet been made as to the extent and type of regeneration that might follow a possible purchase.



Q6. If 'no', what would you prefer to happen to the area?

There appeared to be a degree of confusion amongst some respondents in answering this question. It might be the case that some people interpreted the question as being “*What would you prefer to see happen if THA do not purchase the waterfront?*”

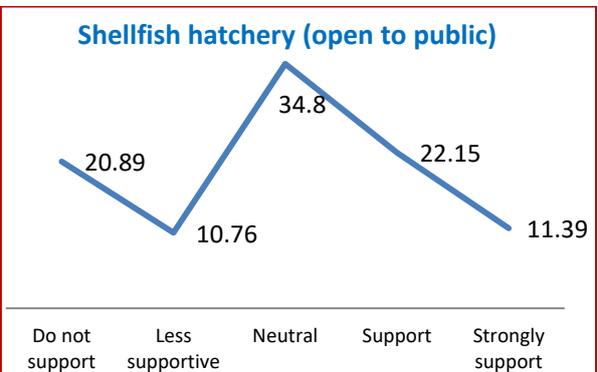
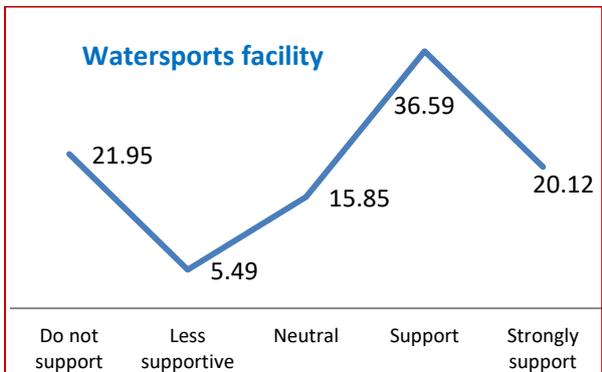
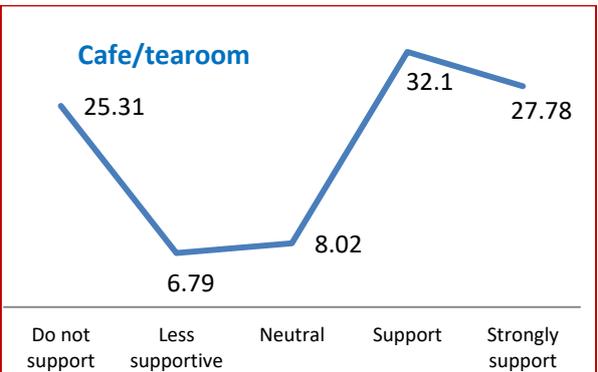
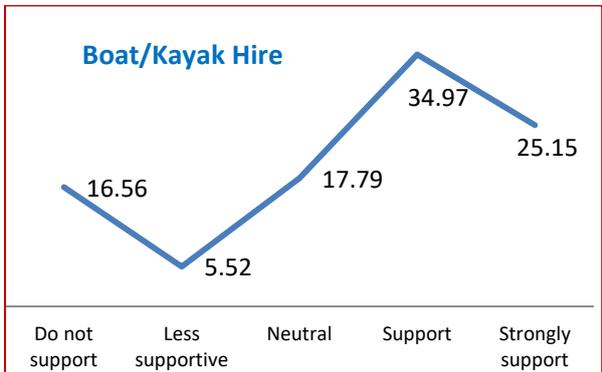
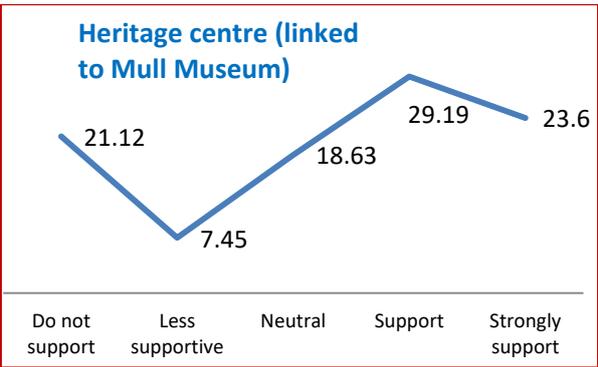
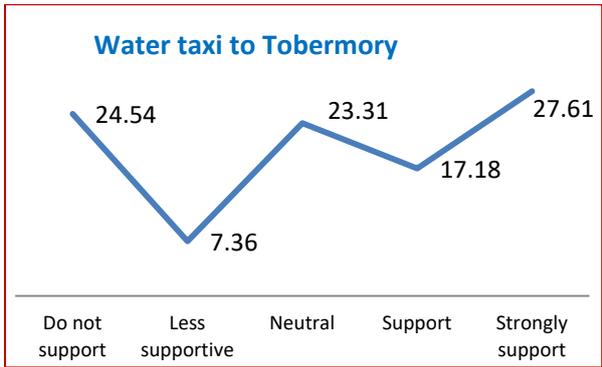
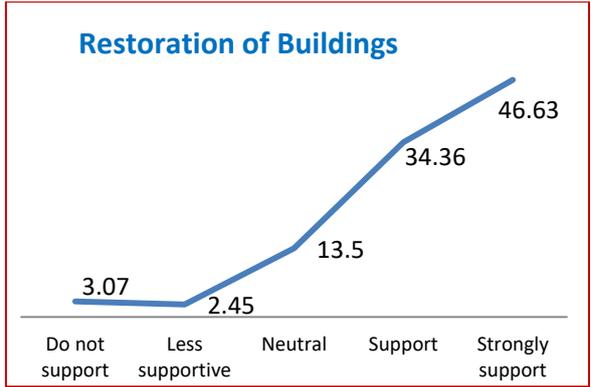
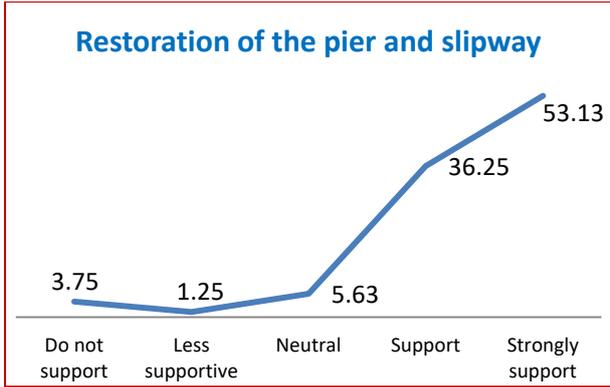
Whatever the case, although only 20 people said 'no' to the previous question, 49 people answered Q6, whilst 72 said that Q6 was 'not applicable'.

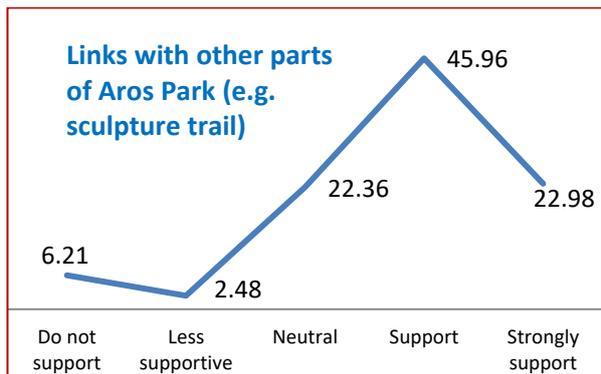
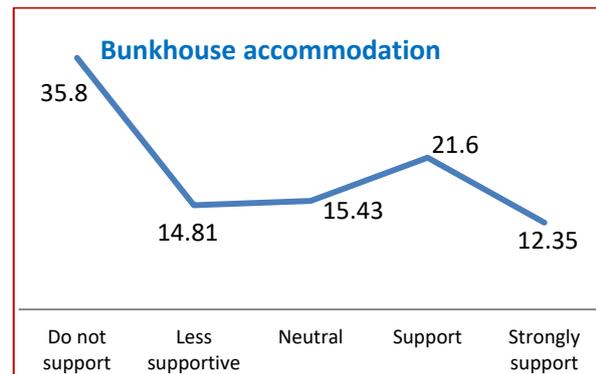
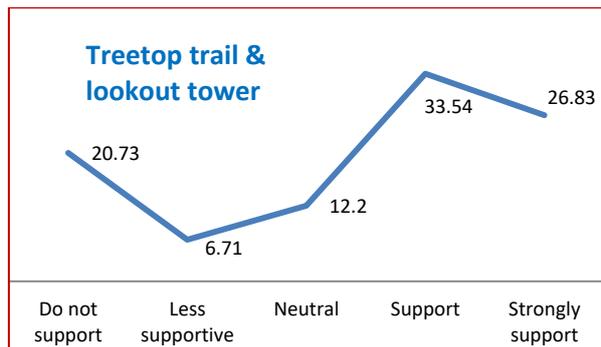
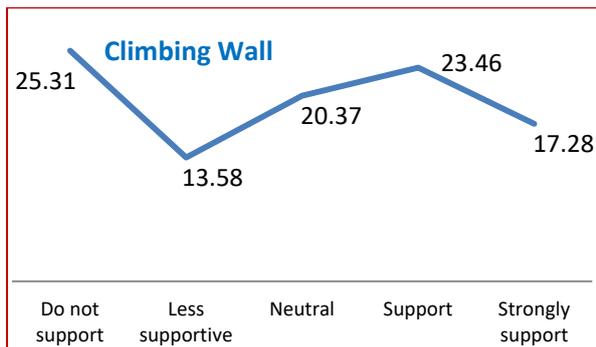
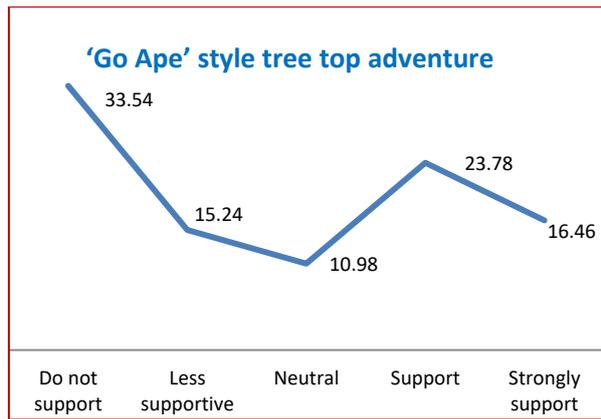
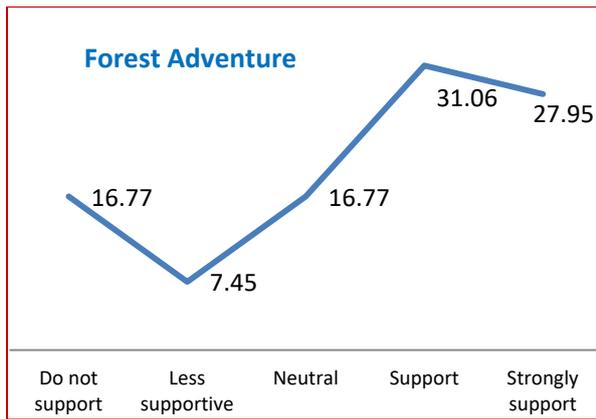
Of the 49 people, 37 would like no change of any kind in the area (presumably with or without a change of ownership) and 4 would like to see another (unnamed group) purchase it. Nobody supported the purchase of the site by a private developer. Eight people offered explicit opinions, all of which support restoration of the pier as a minimum do-something, but opinions broadly ranged from one person wanting the FCS to retain control and pay for the regeneration, another for responsibility to be in the hands of 'a possible joint initiative', and one supporting 'purchase by THA to develop it as an amenity for the benefit of all', which appears to be a 'yes' position of Q5.

Q7. Previous consultations have suggested the following potential social and economic opportunities, which do you support?

The opportunities represented below were presented to respondents in the questionnaire. They had come from previously popular suggestions by members of the public in earlier consultations. They are presented here to test current public support for each in order to guide future planning. However, they are not intended to be the definitive options. Q8 asks people to suggest further options that might be considered, and future consultations would firm up likely development.

Fourteen options were presented in all (see charts below).





Eleven of the fourteen options received more 'support' and 'strong support' than 'less supportive' and 'do not support' responses. Of these, the most popular were the restorations of the pier, slipway and buildings. Only 5% of people were not supportive of any of these options.

The next most supported (69%) was to develop links, such as a sculpture trail, with other parts of the Park. At present there is a 'green gym' trail, but there are also possibilities to create scenic, wildlife or heritage trails. More than 60% supported the option of a treetop trail with a lookout tower, an idea that people have become familiar with from the existing high level waterfall viewing platform at the top of the Park.

The development of the buildings into specific resources was generally popular. The options which all received good levels of support were to open a café or tearoom (60%), and a heritage centre linked to the existing Mull Museum in Tobermory (53%). Less popular, with only 34% support and 50% not supportive, was the suggestion to develop bunkhouse accommodation and people were evenly divided over the option to develop a climbing wall in one of the buildings. A shellfish hatchery open to the public received lower levels of support than 'less' and 'no support'.

The regeneration of the slipway for boat or kayak hire (60%) and a watersports facility (57%) were generally popular, whilst responses of 'support' or 'strong support' (45%) against 'less support' or 'do not support' (32%) were received for the water taxi option. Although 40% generally supported the 'Go Ape' treetop adventure option almost half (49%) of respondents did not support it.

It should be noted that, apart from the overwhelming support for the restoration of the pier and slipway there were a significant number of people who felt 'neutral' about many of the options. We interpret this as a response to the fact that none of the options has so far been worked up to a full development proposal and before offering unqualified support people feel strongly that any regeneration of what is a much loved and used element of Tobermory's culture and heritage should be done so in keeping with need and opportunity, but with sensitivity and in tune with other current uses of the Park.

Comments received

In addition to the responses received to the structured questionnaire, people were also encouraged to give their general observations and suggestions regarding future development types and issues. These ranged from the general endorsement of previous responses to specific new suggestions for consideration as part of future development. These responses are not presented in full here, but a representative summary is provided below.

Supportive responses

- *Unqualified support, such as:* Sounds great, we love visiting Aros park, and would hope any developments were done tastefully and using local resources, offering employment to local people/ The purchase opportunity isn't to be missed!/ I fully support the respectful restoration of the area and think that the local community should be involved/ Jan Dunlop (Ranger) does fantastic work with people in the community. Developing the facilities at Aros Park will offer more opportunities for the whole community and visitors to use the park more increasing Health and Wellbeing for all/ Community owned but with opportunity for private businesses to lease parts to develop ideas above/ I think the initial ideas are pretty fab and hopefully there's enough money and space to do several of them/ I believe that ownership/management of the entire park should eventually fall to the community. THA ownership of the waterfront would be a good way to begin the process/ Would be a fantastic asset to Tobermory/ Wishing you every success/ This project needs to be done after all these years wasted / Great to know that the THA are taking the initiative here to protect another valuable part of Tobermory's past. Well done!
- *A number of responses supported the purchase and general development, whilst emphasising that any regeneration should be done sensitively and with regard to the peacefulness and environmental assets .e.g.* Keep the magic of Aros Park, some new play equipment for kids would be great but feel a cafe etc would just make it too busy!/ I'd like to see a light-touch development, perhaps a little coffee shack and a heritage centre focussed on the land-use history of Mull/ Make the buildings a historic/ information place with tables so people could sit inside and see that while they had a picnic/ I like the idea of using the area of pier being repaired and put into a state of good repair. To use the vacant building is all very well but once again can the road take the extra traffic?/ To bring more jobs to Tobermory can't be sniffed at/ It would be good to develop something that encouraged people respecting the local area and making profit, but nothing that involved anything that disturbs the peace and quiet!
- Kayak hire: rent at Tob - paddle across/ Forest Adventure playground: always very useful resource in the park for an 'outdoor classroom'/ Youth outward bound centre/ Educational

facility for children to visit/ Outdoor activities - linking schools and tourists while providing for local industry/ Conference centre and accommodation for corporate team building/ An adventure hub for Tobermory and Mull/ Somewhere to learn water sports as well as hiring/ Hiking trips, educational school visits/ Dive centre.

- Parking facilities for day visitors to Tobermory, encouraging use of water taxi and to ease pressure on parking availability along Main Street and in Ledaig car park/ Water taxi a great idea - with a tearoom near the pier. Would allow people to walk out and take a water taxi back or vice versa. Works in Ulva so why not here!!
- A path from Apper Mor to pier by Dorlinn would be good/ It would be fantastic to see path to pier from Tobermory improved so pushchairs etc could go along/maybe a boardwalk across the landslip bit
- Do up buildings for a dry picnic spot/ Seating and family gathering areas
- Wildlife sanctuary e.g. for hedgehogs & red squirrels/ Birdwatching & otter hides
- Restoration of mill wheel (as done in Stornoway) – As in low cost energy for developing countries/ As a visitor, something in evenings. Night walks/boat trips, star/moon watching/ Possible craft sales for island producers. High Quality not fairground/ Turn the buildings into year round rental housing for local people? Not holiday lets.
- I would like to see the walled garden restored and more unusual trees planted. This would restore the experience for visitors as it was pre-WWII. (*Nb. This is already being undertaken in a separate project managed by MICT*)

Cautionary, qualified support, or no support responses

- *A handful of responses simply said "No" to any development. E.g. one said: "By developing the park you will destroy the one place locals can go to get away from hordes of tourists." Another: "We do NOT want Aros forest turned into a theme park with traffic and more vehicles. This is a forest park and is rich in wildlife with a diverse species mix and a fairly safe and traffic free walking area. We do NOT want this balance disturbed just to please the collective ego's of the THA and their persistent meddling in affairs other than their designated role in the maintenance and provision of a safe harbour area." Another said "NO NO AND AGAIN NO!!!!!!"*
- Safety and staffing issues with 'Go Ape' or climbing wall – training; insurance; first aid/ On going maintenance and management of the facilities will be crucial
- No Jet skis. Boat/kayak hire should NOT involve water skiers/ Ideally an old steam-launch for the water taxi (and wouldn't it have been lovely to add Mull Railway to that?) or at least an historic sort of boat. Please don't 'modernise' any of it!
- It is important to preserve the local 'secret spot'/ I do strongly object to the area being transformed into a tourist oriented entity as it has been used mainly by local people for many years now as a refuge from large numbers of visitors. By all means attract people to go but as a quiet area enjoyed by all.
- Aros Park is a peaceful haven for locals and visitors. I can see the merit in repairing the slipway and the pier, but the other suggestions seem unnecessary, with potential very high running costs such as insurance/training costs etc. Are services such as electricity/water/sewage available?
- I think it would be nice if the development had a focus on the local population's need. My worry would be too much development would spoil the unique and quiet place Aros is. I think if it was over run with campervans and yachts this would put off locals from using it.
- Worry that a water taxi would create free parking in Aros Park for folk taxi-ing to Tobermory.

- Definitely no overnight accommodation - this would change the whole atmosphere of the park and be detrimental to the wildlife - flora, fauna etc.

Summary

The Park is currently well used. Very regularly used by many. It is well liked and serves an important function as an accessible recreation resource for the people of Tobermory and beyond. The level of support for the development has been significant throughout our community consultation process and we are happy to see that there are very few negative responses received, although we have shown these in the above report as being relevant concerns of a small proportion of respondents. In answer to the simple question "Should the THA purchase the Aros Park Waterfront?" there was overwhelming support.

Similarly, there is a clear direction from respondents for the THA, at the minimum, to repair the buildings, slipway and pier. This is the urgent need for the site and the public, the THA and FCS have been able to offer few if any alternatives. Beyond this there is an apparent awareness of, and support for, the need to develop social and economic opportunities on the site and many of the individual suggestions in the consultation received good levels of support. The THA are aware that whilst these responses are a good basis for developing an indicative regeneration programme and Business Plan, there will be much more work needed to develop and fund appropriate longer term projects. In summary we have given the last words from this report to three members of the public. The first said "Absolutely go for it ! ...but it may need doing in stages because to purchase and refurb all in one go might be a big ask. Be prepared to develop in stages." The second said "Aros Park is a place of peace & tranquillity... Please think very carefully about the long term affect any developments will have on the existing businesses and residents of Tobermory." The third said simply "Be brave and go for it!"