

River Ness Arts projects – Survey results

1. Key Findings

The Inverness City Arts Working Group, in partnership with Creative Scotland and Highlands and Islands Enterprise, sought public opinions through a survey on proposals for the River Ness Art Projects which could see major artworks installed on the banks of the River Ness between Ness Bridge and Friars Bridge. The key findings from this survey are:

- Respondents who completed the survey having visited the exhibition on the potential art projects were generally more positive in their feedback than those who completed the survey online;
- Over 50 % of respondents indicated that the Rest Spaces (55%); The Trail (65%); and River Connections (55%) proposals would complement the River Ness area;
- Less than 50% of respondents indicated that The Gathering Place (33%); The Sculptural Destination (34%) and Children’s Riverside Water Feature (48%) would complement the River Ness area;
- The majority (54.3 %) of respondents indicated that they did not feel that the River Ness Art projects were a good investment with lasting impact;
- The majority of respondents indicated that they either strongly disagreed (49.5%) or disagreed (9.7%) to “The Gathering Place” being located at Friars Shott;
- Just over a third of respondents indicated that they would visit “The Gathering Place” once it was constructed, whilst just over half indicated that they would not;
- The majority of respondents (57%) indicated that Friars Shott is not an appropriate location for a performance area;
- The majority of respondents either strongly disagreed (46.8%) or disagreed (12.2%) that “The Gathering Place” would attract visitors to the area and would boost the local economy;
- There was a high response rate to an open question asking for further comments. Feedback received was largely negative and centred on “The Gathering Place”. Feedback focused on the cost of the art projects – particularly at a time of reducing Council budgets - and alternative ideas for investment, health and safety concerns, and the design of the art projects.

2. Project Background

The £758,350 River Ness Arts projects have been commissioned by the Highland Council’s Inverness City Arts Working Group and has funding approved from:

- Creative Scotland £305,600 (40%);

- The City of Inverness Common Good Fund £280,750 (37%);
- The Highland Council £106,000 (14%); and
- Highlands and Islands Enterprise £66,000 (9%).

The River Ness Arts Projects incorporates a number of artworks, including:

- River Connections: seating areas and poetry set into stones.
- The Gathering Place: a major artwork designed to bring people together to enjoy the River Ness.
- The Sculptural Destination: an iconic landmark to visit, interact with, or view.
- Rest Spaces: relaxation areas for individuals or small groups.
- The Trail: a paper or digital map and trail from Ness islands to the river mouth including things of local interest.
- Children's Riverside Water Feature: for young people and families with educational opportunities.

The Project Programme was commissioned by the Council, supported by Creative Scotland, Inverness Common Good Fund and Highlands and Islands Enterprise. The Evaluation Panel comprising of industry experts, selected the recommended projects. Apart from River Connections, these are all at the design stage. The Gathering Place is about to go to detailed design and before doing so, it was prudent to consult in particular, on the intended location. The results can now be taken into account as we move forward.

3. Methodology

The survey contains 11 questions on the proposed River Ness Arts projects and details about the respondent. The survey was distributed in two ways: through an online survey available to everyone through the Council's website, and through a printed survey that people were asked to fill out after viewing the proposed projects at an exhibition in the Eastgate Shopping Centre and thereafter at Inverness Museum and Art Gallery. All respondents were asked to view the proposals either online or at the exhibition prior to completing the survey.

4. Respondents

There were 445 respondents to the survey. 282 people filled in the paper survey after visiting the exhibition in person and 163 people completed the survey online. 59.2% of respondents were female, and 40.8% male. 81% of respondents were aged 45 and older, with 9% under 34 years old, Figure 1.

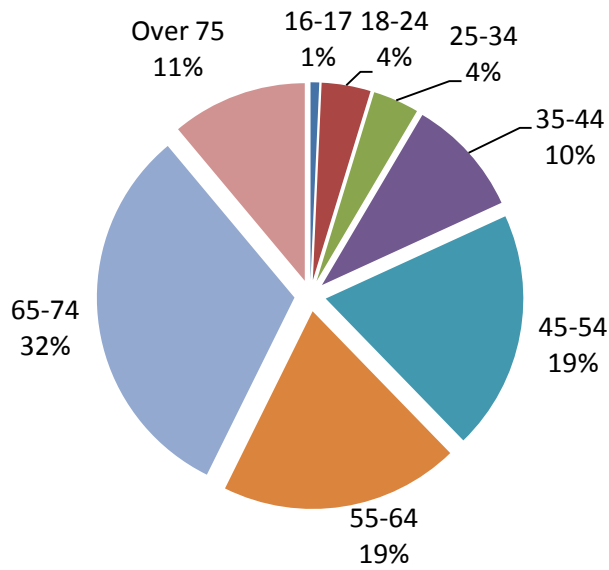


Figure 1: Age profile of respondents

The survey was completed by people from 39 different postcode areas, the majority all within the Highland Council area. Over three quarters of respondents were from the Inverness area with 50% from an IV2 postcode, 21% from IV3, and 3% from IV1, Figure 2.

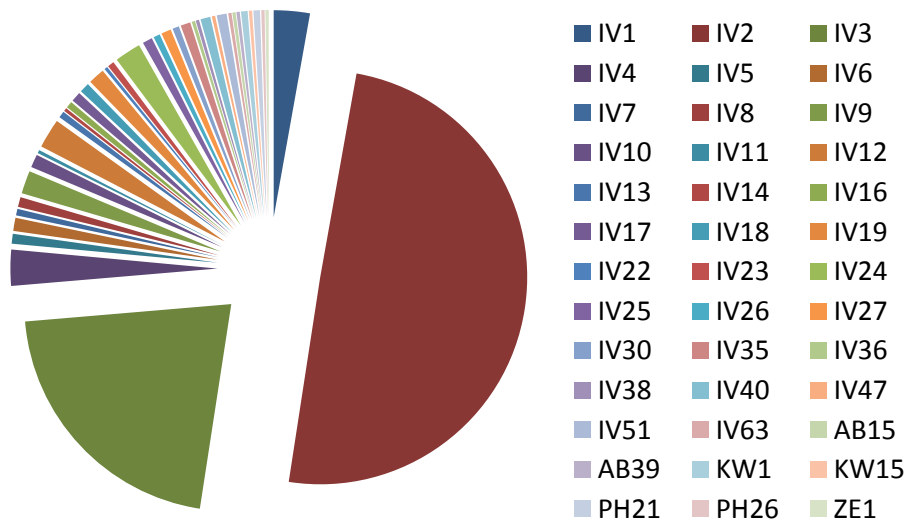


Figure 2: First part of respondent's postcode

Respondents were also asked if they walked or cycled on the roads and bridges within the vicinity of the proposed arts projects. The majority of respondents indicated they either often or occasionally use these routes, Figure 3.

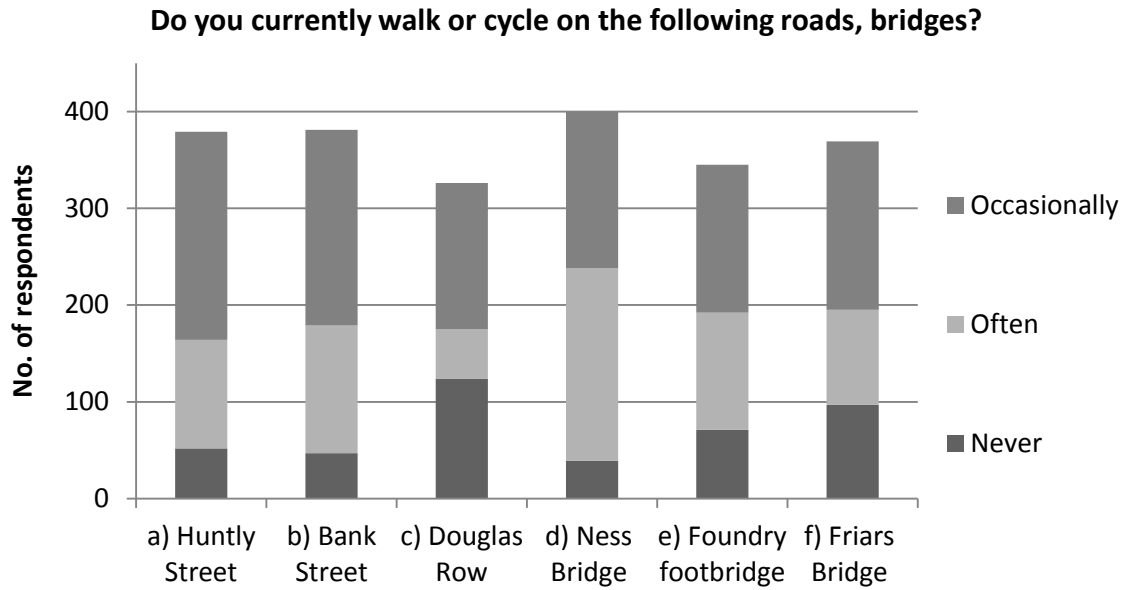


Figure 3: Walking and cycling habits of survey respondents

5. Survey analysis

Q1. The artists chosen to deliver the River Ness Arts Projects were recommended by an advisory panel of independent experts. Having looked at the exhibition - for each of the projects do you agree that the designs/proposals will complement the River Ness area?

Over 50 % of respondents indicated that the Rest Spaces (55%); The Trail (65%); and River Connections (55%) proposals would complement the River Ness area, Figure 4. Less than 50% of respondents indicated that The Gathering Place (33%); The Sculptural Destination (34%) and Children’s Riverside Water Feature (48%) would complement the River Ness area.

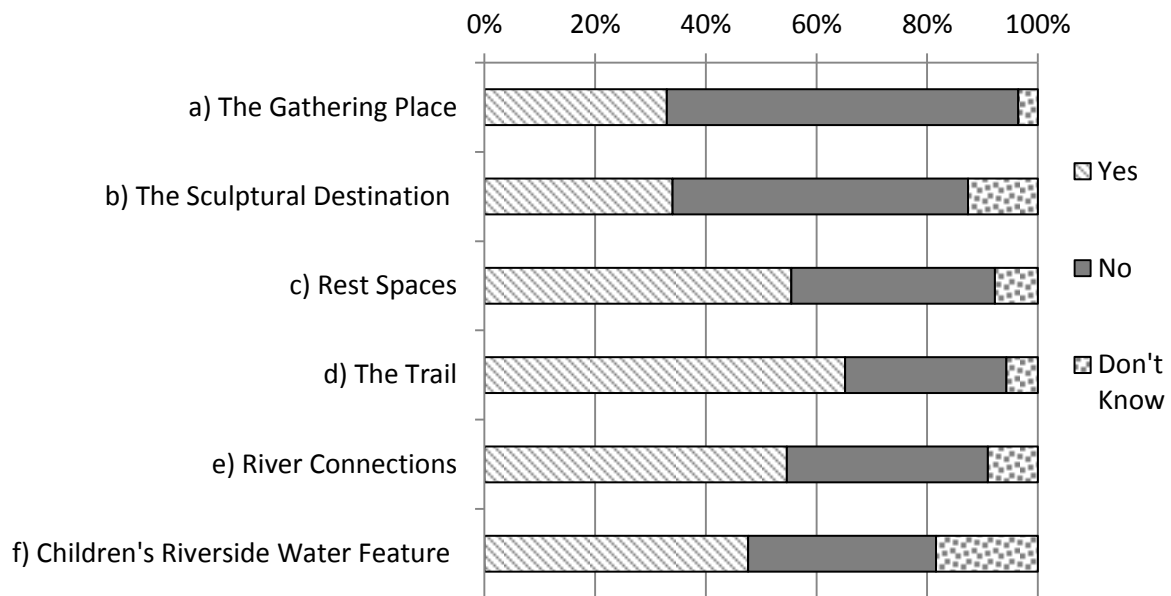


Figure 4: Response to question 1.

The dataset can also be separated into those who filled out the survey electronically, and those who visited the exhibition and then completed the survey in a paper format.

Agreement that the projects will complement the River Ness area is consistently higher amongst those who visited the exhibition than those who did not, Table 1.

Table 1: Percentage of respondents who answered “yes” to question 1.

	Paper survey	Electronic survey	Combined
The Gathering Place	46 %	11 %	33 %
The Sculptural Destination	48 %	11 %	34 %
Rest Spaces	65 %	40 %	55 %
The Trail	80 %	42 %	65 %
River Connections	70 %	29 %	55 %
Children’s Riverside Water Feature	58 %	30 %	48 %

Q2. Funding for the River Ness Art Projects will bring a considerable investment to the local economy from national and local agencies. Do you agree that the River Ness Art Projects are a good investment with lasting impact?

The majority (54.3 %) of respondents indicated that they did not feel that the River Ness Art projects were a good investment with lasting impact, Figure 5.

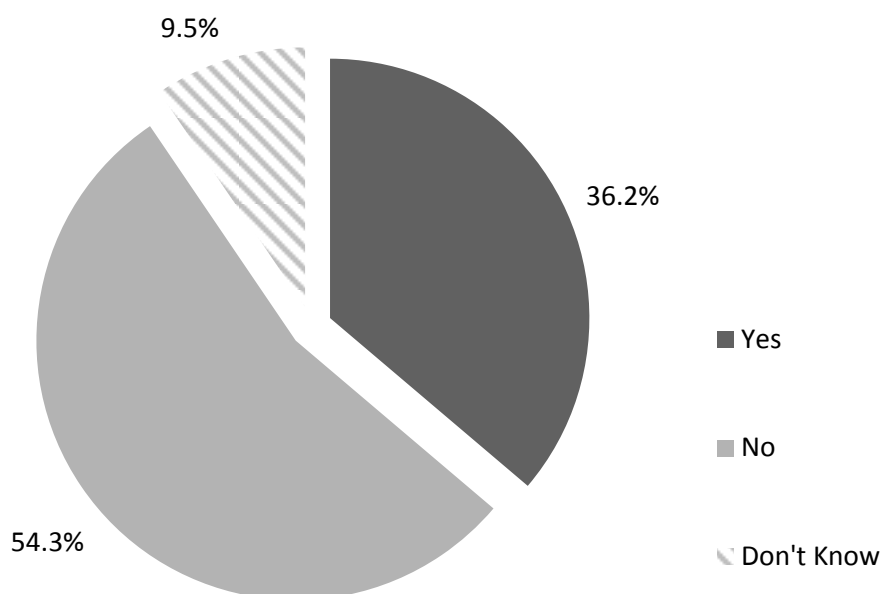


Figure 5: Response to question 2.

By separating the respondents into those who filled out the survey electronically and those who attended the exhibition and completed a paper response, we get two very different sets of opinions. The majority (50.2 %) of people who responded having visited the exhibition agreed that the projects were a good investment with lasting impact, compared to 13 % of those who responded electronically, Table 2.

Table 2: Response to question 2.

	Paper	Electronic
Yes	50.2 %	13.0 %
No	39.0 %	79.6 %
Don't know	10.8 %	7.4 %

Q3. Friars Shott at the north end of Huntly Street has been identified as the preferred site for the Gathering Place. Do you agree that the Gathering Place should be located there?

The majority of respondents indicated that they either strongly disagreed (49.5%) or disagreed (9.7%) to “The Gathering Place” being located at Friars Shott, Figure 6.

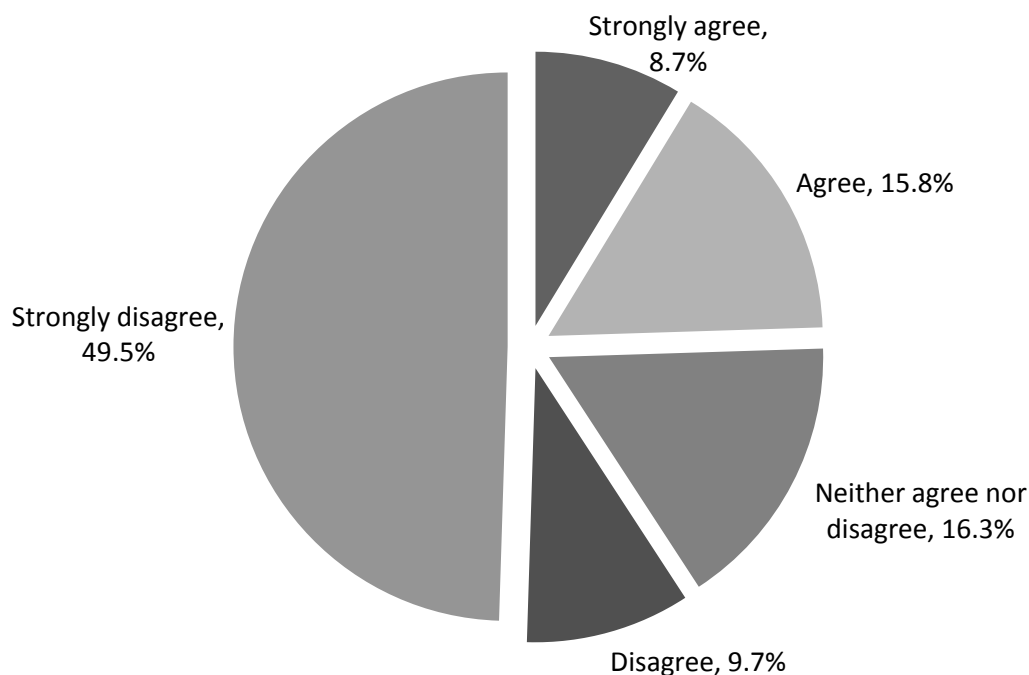


Figure 6: Response to question 3.

Support for the location of “The Gathering Place” at Friars Shott was stronger from those who visited the exhibition and completed the survey in paper format than from those who completed the survey electronically, Table 3. Of those who completed the survey electronically, 71.6 % strongly disagreed with the suggested location.

Table 3: Responses to question 3

	Paper	Electronic
Strongly Agree	13.0 %	1.3 %
Agree	23.4 %	2.6 %
Neither agree nor disagree	16.7 %	15.5 %
Disagree	10.0 %	9.0 %
Strongly Disagree	36.8 %	71.6 %

Q4. The Gathering Place would be a large unique interactive art installation. Will you visit the Gathering Place when it is built to experience this work?

Just over a third of respondents indicated that they would visit “The Gathering Place” once it was constructed, whilst just over half indicated that they would not, Figure 7.

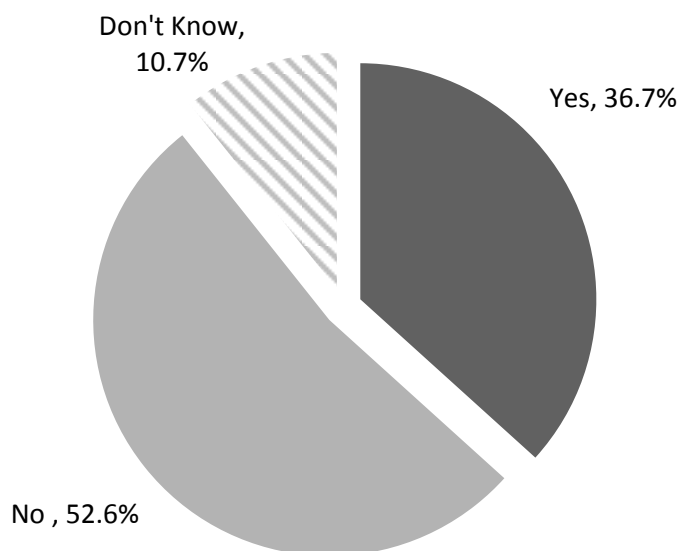


Figure 7: Response to question 4.

People completing a paper copy of the survey having visited the exhibition were more likely to indicate that they would visit “The Gathering Place” following installation (52%), than those who completed the form electronically (10%).

Q5. The Gathering Place may have the possibility to be used as an outdoor performance area. Do you think Friars Shott is an appropriate location for a performance area?

The majority of respondents (57%) indicated that Friars Shott is not an appropriate location for a performance area. As with other questions, the response was generally more positive from those who attended the exhibition than those who completed the survey electronically, however the majority were still not in favour of Friars Shott as a location, Figure 8.

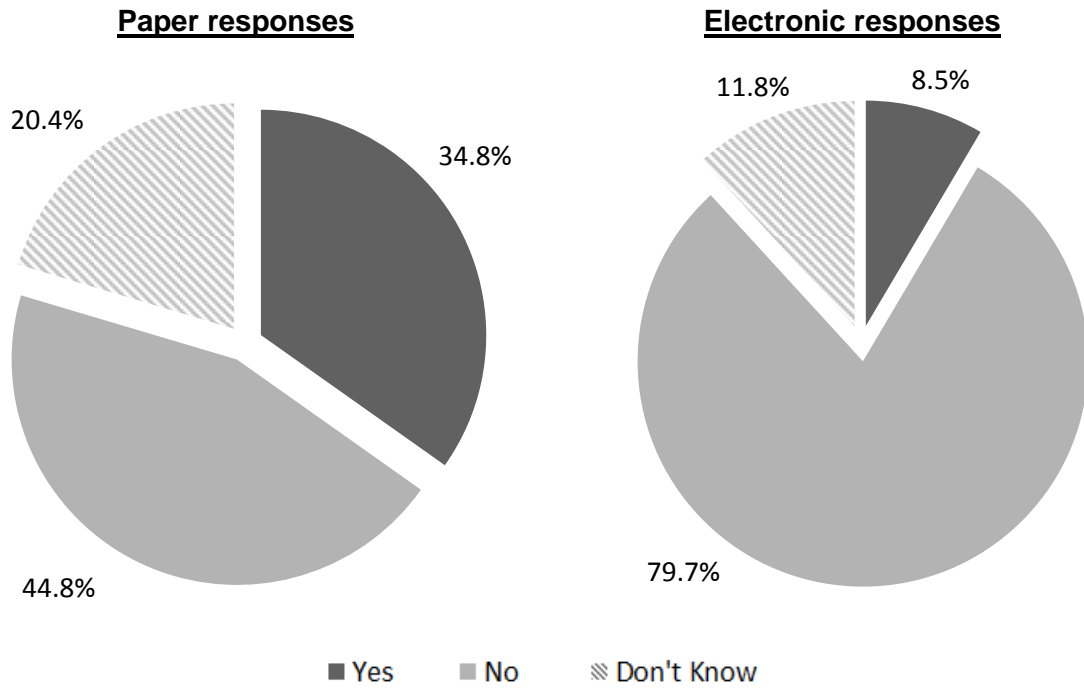


Figure 8: Response to question 5.

Q6. The Gathering Place would be a unique design intended to attract visitors to the area and boost the local economy. Do you agree?

The majority of respondents either strongly disagreed (46.8%) or disagreed (12.2%) that “The Gathering Place” would attract visitors to the area and would boost the local economy, Figure 9.

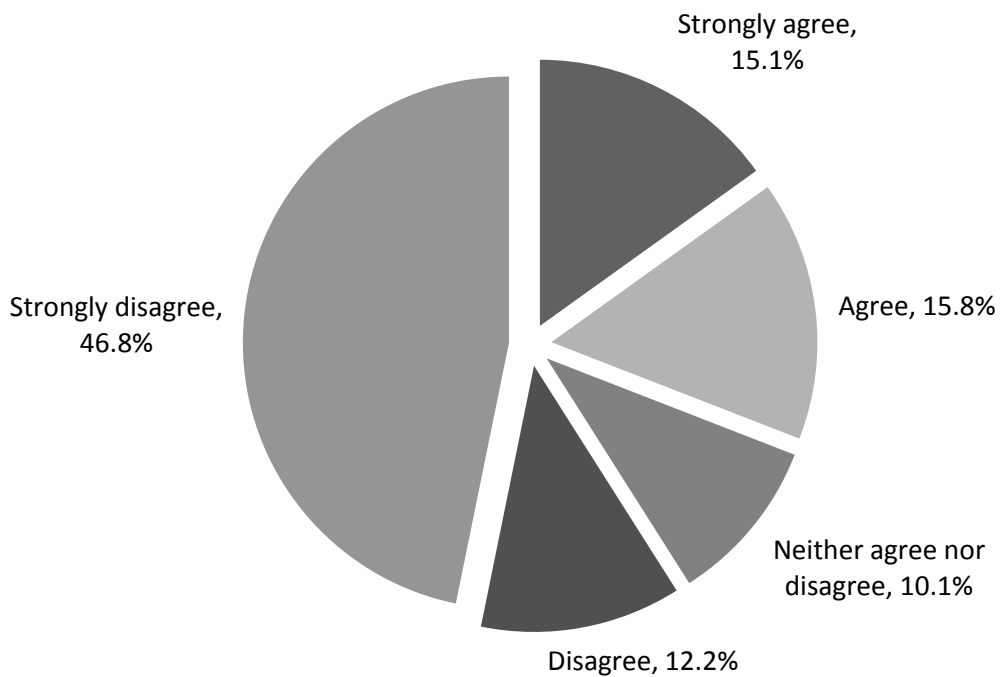


Figure 9: Response to question 6

84.4% of the respondents who completed the survey electronically either strongly disagreed (66.9%) or disagreed (17.5%) with the statement in question 6. Responses from those who completed the survey having visited the exhibition were divided, with 43.5% either strongly agreeing or agreeing with the statement in question 6, and 44.6% either disagreeing or strongly disagreeing.

Q11. Please provide further comments that you may have about any of the proposals for the River Ness artworks below.

There was a high response rate to this question with 304 respondents (out of a total of 445) leaving comments. To enable analysis of these comments they were classified as being either: Generally positive; generally negative, or neutral/ mixed comments. It should be noted that this analysis of the feedback is intrinsically subjective as it involves the interpretation of people’s comments.

Generally positive: 41

Generally negative: 219

Neutral/ mixed comments: 44

The positive comments highlighted the bold design of the artworks, the location, the potential regeneration of the area, and also supported the aspirational nature of the projects.

However, most of the feedback to this question was generally negative in nature, with most comments focussing on the “Gathering Place” proposal. To enable further analysis of this qualitative data, the negative comments were categorised to highlight the key issues, Table 4. This analysis should be treated with care, as the question did not specifically ask for people to comment on each of the categories, therefore respondents cannot to be said not to have views on e.g. public art or design merely because they have left no comment.

	Cost/ Better uses for funding	Maintenance costs	Location	Scepticism about public art	Design	Health and Safety
Comments	157	8	17	10	57	35

Table 4: Classification of the negative comments received as part of Q11.

The majority of negative comments received were related to the cost of the projects, and questioned this investment for a number of reasons such as current austerity/ pressure on public sector budgets, or that other areas for spend should be prioritised. Concerns were

also raised about ongoing maintenance costs especially in relation to potential vandalism and graffiti.

A number of comments were also raised about design, questioning whether the design of “The Gathering Place” was suitable for Inverness and Friars Shott, and also whether the artwork would negatively impact on the view of the river from other locations.

Health and safety concerns were also noted with regards to “The Gathering Place” and its proposed location at Friars Shott. These concerns focused on the artwork as an entry point to the river, it being located near a pub, and being on a busy route for commuting school children.

Respondents who visited the exhibition and completed the survey in a paper format were less likely to raise concerns around the potential costs of the artworks, but more likely to raise concerns with the design of the artworks.

The concerns noted through the survey have been compiled to form an issues report, Appendix A.

Appendix A: River Ness Arts Projects - Issues Report

A survey was conducted to gather views on the proposed River Ness Arts Projects. This was made available at a public exhibition, as an electronic version through the Council's website, and was sent to local Community Councils. As a result of this survey a number of technical issues and general concerns were raised by the public as individuals and through representation on community councils. This report details these concerns.

The issues raised are presented in two separate sections: Technical issues that may be able to be addressed by professionals involved in the project; and general concerns which may require more in-depth consideration and discussion with communities.

Technical issues:

- Proposed developments are within a designated conservation area – are these projects suitable/ have they been approved by the conservation officer?
- Where will the hydraulics of the Gathering Place be housed, could oil be leaked into the river? How often will the mechanism be maintained and who will be responsible for this?
- Will the pivot point of the bridge be cordoned off to prevent potential injury?
- Will there be a maximum occupancy on the Gathering Place, and how would this be enforced?
- Who will be liable in the case of an accident and legal procedures at the Gathering Place?
- What will be the height of the guard rails to prevent people from climbing over the side?
- Will the Gathering Place be slippery when wet – could this lead to slips and falls?
- How long will the Gathering Place function for – will there be some sort of guarantee?
- Friars Street provides access for the Charity raft race and the Duck race – will this be lost if the Gathering Place is constructed?
- The design of the seating areas (no back support) means that they will be uncomfortable and unsuitable for many.
- Brass rails on the rest spaces will attract more seagulls to the area.

General concerns:

Cost/ Use of Funding:

- The use of public money is not justified in times of austerity with other services being reduced and when staff are being made redundant?
- There are more appropriate uses of public money – wide range of responses, but focus on improving the local services that the Council already provides.

- Is this an appropriate use of Inverness Common Good Fund?
- How will the on-going maintenance of the artworks, including vandalism/ graffiti be funded?

Location of the Gathering Place:

- Anecdotal lack of support for artwork from local residents (“being forced on our area”)
- At low tide, in its current location, the Gathering Place will be over the river bed, rather than the river.
- Friars Shott is the only green space near the town where you can sit with your children and is therefore not suitable for this project.
- Insufficient space at the current location of the Gathering Place for the public to congregate, site is too restricted to act as a performance space.
- Potential noise concerns from local residents at night.
- The location will take footfall away from the city centre.
- Friars Shott location is not appropriate - will overlook Glebe Street block of flats and the Kessock Road bridge.
- Gathering Place is too large and will dominate the riverside. It will interrupt the view of the river from other viewpoints. It will negatively impact the iconic Inverness skyline (church steeples and the castle).

Design:

- Design of the Gathering Place is not keeping with Inverness – should focus more on heritage. The artwork has no connection to Inverness – could be located anywhere in the world.
- Design of artworks “industrialises” a natural feature with concrete and metal. Takes away from the natural environment of the river.

Health and Safety:

- Safety concerns – access to open water, particularly after hours when the Gathering Place would be accessible and unsupervised.
- Belief that the Gathering Place will “attract trouble” – pranks, groups gathering to take drugs, drink etc.
- Located near pub – people jumping off/ falling off the Gathering Place under the influence of alcohol.
- Route for school children on way to school – will young people use the Gathering Place for bike/ skateboard stunts, jumping into the river as a dare?

- Concern about suicide attempts – open access to the river
- Will the Gathering Place be safe for the disabled/ wheelchair accessible?

Other:

- How will the Gathering Place be marketed to ensure its success?
- Could the trail be extended to visit places in the town, such as Abertaff House, Old Dunbar Hospital, Leakey's Church and the Old High Church
- The project has not been properly consulted upon with local residents. Lack of public engagement. Need more awareness raising events
- Doubts about the survey being a legitimate engagement process – view that decisions have already been taken.
- Inverness has a fantastic tourist trade and this won't attract additional visitors
- No transparency around who was on the expert panel who commissioned the works.
- What will be the impact be on local fishermen?