



OPW Oifig na
nOibreacha Poiblí
Office of Public Works



EVENTS AT IVEAGH GARDENS CONSULTATION ANALYSIS

November 2023

IVEAGH GARDENS EVENT CONSULTATION ANALYSIS

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IVEAGH GARDENS EVENT CONSULTATION ANALYSIS

Executive Summary

Often referred to as Dublin's 'secret garden', Iveagh Gardens is located adjacent to the National Concert Hall and to the south of St Stephen's Green. It is managed by the Office of Public Works (OPW) and attract over 400,000 visitors annually,

Historically, Iveagh Gardens has hosted events from the nineteenth century up to recent times including Girl Guides Jamborees, fireworks displays and archery competitions. A formal events process commenced in 2006 and events have been a feature of the Gardens since then. Throughout the summer, events include cultural events, a music concert series, comedy events and a food & drink festival.

The OPW is undertaking a review of events in Iveagh Gardens. As part of this process, the OPW held a public consultation that invited observations from members of the public and key stakeholders relating to the holding of events in the Gardens. The consultation commenced on Friday 1 September with an original deadline for submissions of Saturday 30th September, which was subsequently extended to Friday 6 October. A dedicated email inbox (eventsiveaghgardens@opw.ie) was set up for observations to be sent to. Hard copies could be posted to the OPW. SYSTRA had been commissioned by the OPW to undertake analysis of all submissions received.

A total of **1,220** submissions to the consultation were received. A respondent provided multiple submissions; there were submissions from a total of **1,199** unique senders.

The vast majority of submissions 90% (1,085) reported positive sentiment regarding the holding of events in the Gardens, with 5% (63) not supporting such events. A total of 40 submissions (3%) were neutral in their feedback on this topic.

A series of key themes commonly raised within comments has been identified. All submissions, regardless of their length and format were included within this analysis. Key themes identified and presented are:

- Accessibility;
- Green Space;
- Frequency of Events;
- Opening Hours; and
- Park Facilities.

Standalone analysis of feedback from key stakeholders has also been undertaken and presented, including local residents, the Friends of Iveagh Gardens, event promoters and elected representatives.

IVEAGH GARDENS EVENT CONSULTATION ANALYSIS

Introduction

Often referred to as Dublin's 'secret garden', Iveagh Gardens is located adjacent to the National Concert Hall and to the south of St Stephen's Green. It is managed by the Office of Public Works (OPW).

The Gardens were designed by Ninian Niven in 1865 as the grounds for the Dublin Exhibition Palace and contain a number of unique features including water features, a sunken archery garden, urban woodlands, a maze, rosarium (Figure 1) and rockeries.

Figure 1. Iveagh Gardens Rose Garden



Historically, Iveagh Gardens has hosted events from the nineteenth century up to recent times including Girl Guides Jamborees, fireworks displays and archery competitions. A formal events process commenced in 2006 and events have been a feature of the Gardens since then.

While the Gardens attract over 400,000 visitors annually, the OPW facilitates local community activities such as school sports days, local crèche activities, photoshoots for business and charities. Heritage and biodiversity events are programmed for the gardens including Tree Day & National Tree Week activities, which is rolled out with local schools. Specialised garden tours lead by the OPW Gardener are available on requested.

Medium to large-scale events have been a feature of the gardens in recent years. It hosts a number of events throughout the summer, including music concerts ("Live at the Iveagh Gardens"), comedy events and a food & drink festival.

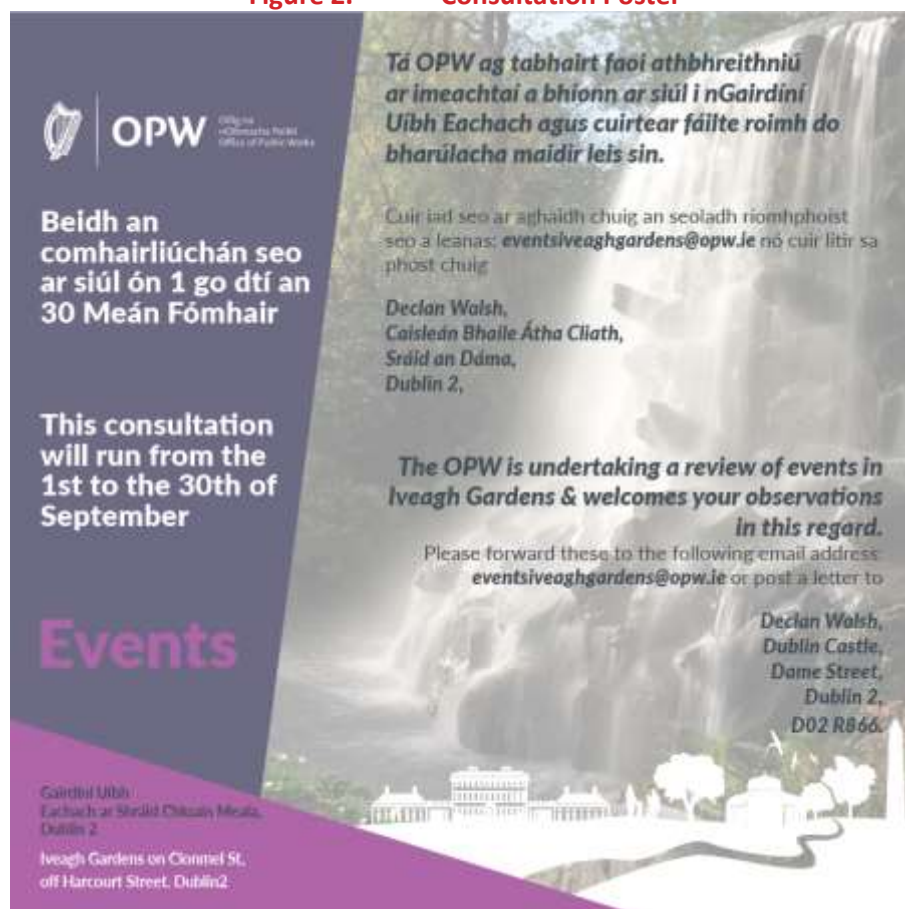
Consultation Overview

The OPW is undertaking a review of events in Iveagh Gardens. As part of this process, the OPW held a public consultation that invited observations from members of the public and key stakeholders relating to the holding of events in the Gardens. The consultation commenced on Friday 1 September with an original deadline for submissions of Saturday 30th September. This was subsequently extended by six days to Friday 6 October.

A dedicated email inbox (eventsiveaghgardens@opw.ie) was set up for observations to be sent to. Hard copies could also be posted to the OPW.

Posters (Figure 2) raising awareness of the consultation were placed at the entrances to the grounds of Iveagh Gardens, with the consultation also promoted on social media.

Figure 2. Consultation Poster



Analysis Methodology

SYSTRA has been commissioned by the OPW to undertake analysis of all submissions received. A python-based tool was used to perform a Natural Language Sentiment Analysis (NLP) to identify main themes within submissions and to develop a sentiment score for each submission. As a first step, the data was processed as follows:

Pre-processing the text into clean words: Unnecessary words and characters were removed to keep only what is meaningful to capture the sentiment and topic of the messages.

A lemmatization process was subsequently applied to the data, which is the process of grouping together the different inflected forms of a word so they can be analysed as a single item. This links words with similar meanings to one word.

Following this, the python module 'SciKit Learn' was used to develop a trainable sentiment analysis engine that could read all open-ended responses and estimate a compound score based on the positive and negative sentiment associated with the message. This approach makes use of the generic Valence Aware Dictionary and Sentiment Reasoner (VADER) available as part of the Natural Language Toolkit (NLTK).

Parallel to this, the python-based tool uses a technique called "k-Means" to automatically cluster unlabelled messages into core topics. It does so by counting the number of appearances of each one to four-word phrase within the dataset containing all submissions, to identify top recurring phrases. Then, it matches each of the messages to a common topic made of a set of word of phrases.

Alongside this automated process, a manual review of all submissions has been undertaken to determine whether the submission supports, does not support or is neutral to events in Iveagh Gardens. Key themes have also been identified, such as the importance of green space, opening hours of the Gardens and the impacts of build processes for events.

Analysis includes all email, letter and hard copy submissions. Submissions have been analysed anonymously.

In addition to inclusion within the overarching analysis, submissions from key stakeholders have been considered separately. A list of key stakeholders was provided to SYSTRA by the OPW for this purpose.

Response Overview

A total of **1,220** submissions to the consultation were received. Where more than one submission was made by an individual, these have been combined into one for ease of analysis. This results in a total of **1,199** submissions by unique senders.

The consultation required respondents to email their views, rather than complete a survey with a set of closed questions. However, a small proportion provided either no text body (for example "Sent from my iPhone" the only message text in three submissions) or provided one sentence only, with 19 submissions providing such a submission (for example, "*I would love for gigs to continue at Iveagh Gardens*", "*These events are great. Keep them please*" and "*Put an end to those gigs in the Iveagh Gardens for me. Sound!*").

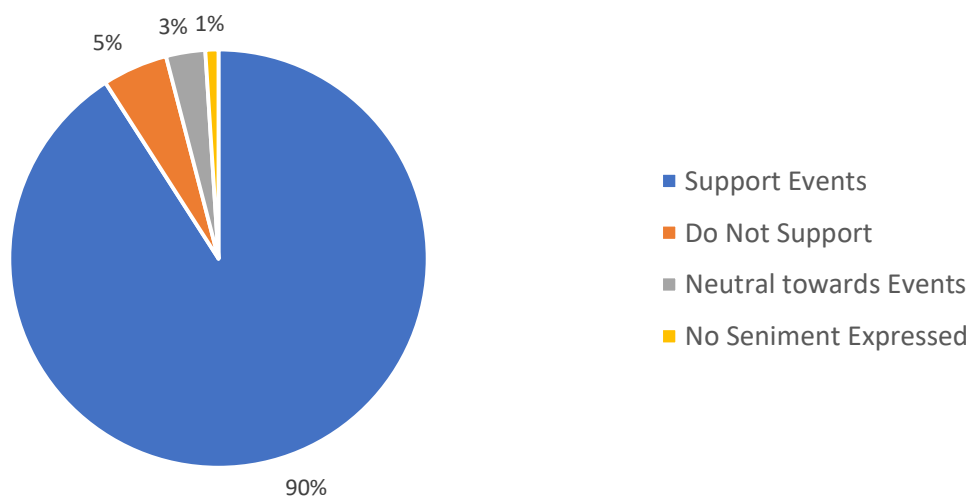
Figure 3. Event at Iveagh Gardens



As detailed above, a review has been undertaken of the contents of all submissions to confirm whether each submission supports, does not support or is neutral to events being held in Iveagh Gardens. A summary of sentiment reported is given in **Figure 4**. It can be seen that the vast majority of submissions 90% (1,085) reported positive sentiment regarding the holding of events in the Gardens, with 5% (63) not supporting such events. A total of 40 submissions (3%) were neutral in their feedback on this topic.

Figure 4. Sentiment Analysis (All Submissions)

Event Sentiment



Key Themes

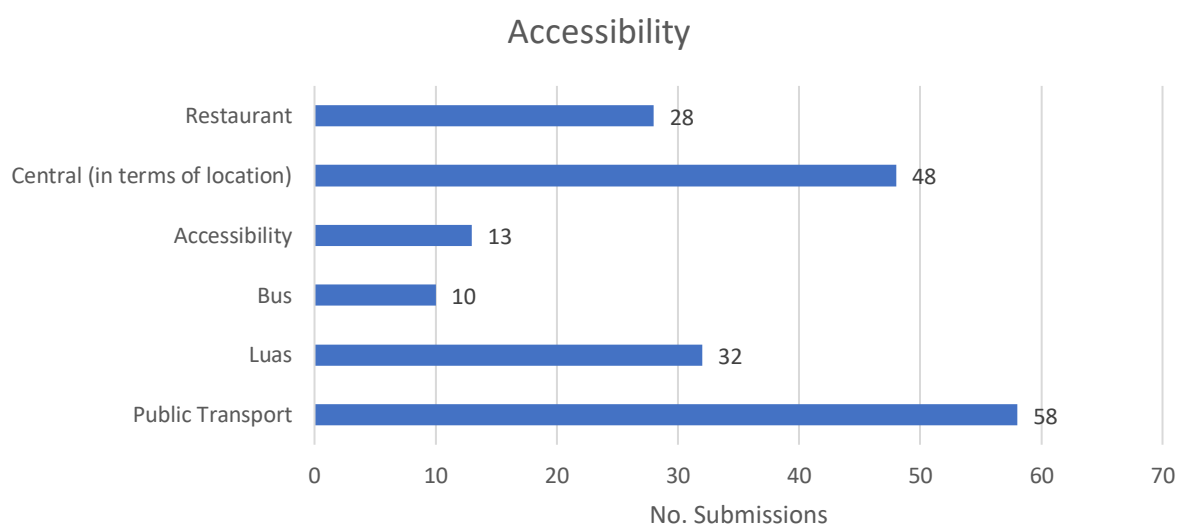
Using a combination of automated and manual analysis of submissions received, a series of key themes commonly raised within comments has been identified. All submissions, regardless of their length and format (email, PDF attachment, etc) are included within this analysis. The following key themes have been identified and are presented in turn below:

- Accessibility;
- Green Space;
- Frequency of Events;
- Opening Hours; and
- Park Facilities.

Accessibility

The location of the Gardens was identified as a positive in terms of holding events by multiple respondents, given easy access to public transport links and complementary destinations (e.g. food and drink outlets) as a result of the city centre location. An overview of key words raised under this theme is provided in **Figure 5**, followed by further detail of response content.

Figure 5. Accessibility (All Submissions)



The central location of the Gardens was praised, particularly compared to other music venues where similar events are held in Dublin. This includes the ability to travel by public transport to and from events (58 respondents), with 32 respondents mentioning they utilise the Luas to travel to the Gardens, and ten referencing bus services.

A total of 28 submissions included the word “*restaurant*”. Of these, 11 noted the proximity of nearby restaurant facilities to the Gardens within its city centre location. A further nine commented on the positive impact of increased footfall on nearby restaurants, whilst one raised concerns of the potential financial impact of stopping events on local restaurants and bars.

Green Space

The importance of the Iveagh Gardens as a green space within the city centre was a frequently referenced theme, with **47** submissions noting the respondent makes use of the Gardens as a green space (relaxation, exercise, dog walking).

A number of submissions also noted the green space provides a unique setting for cultural events and music concerts as a particular benefit that should be harnessed. This included within some stock response submissions (see below).

Reduce Events

A total of **47** submissions noted a desire for the frequency or number of events in the Gardens to be reduced. Not all submissions noting that the frequency of events should be reduced were against such events being held in the Gardens; 16 expressed either support or neutral sentiment towards the holding of events in general.

Opening Hours

At present the Gardens open at 08:00, Monday to Saturday, and 10:00 on Sundays and Bank Holidays. Closing times depend on the month and correlates to hours of darkness.

A total of **28** submissions made reference to the opening hours of the Iveagh Gardens. Comments were predominantly raised in terms of the fluctuating opening hours and actual hours not always reflecting advertised hours. In addition, **12** submissions requested the opening hours of the Gardens be extended.

Park Facilities

Some submissions made reference to facilities within the Gardens unrelated to the holding of events. These included **16** submissions referencing the provision of bins and litter facilities, whilst **15** submissions requested improved seating facilities.

Key Stakeholders

Manual detailed analysis of comments provided by key stakeholders has been undertaken. Feedback provided from the following stakeholders, identified by the OPW, is presented in turn below:

- Local Residents;
- Friends of Iveagh Gardens;
- Aiken Promotions;
- Equinox Events; and
- Elected Representatives.

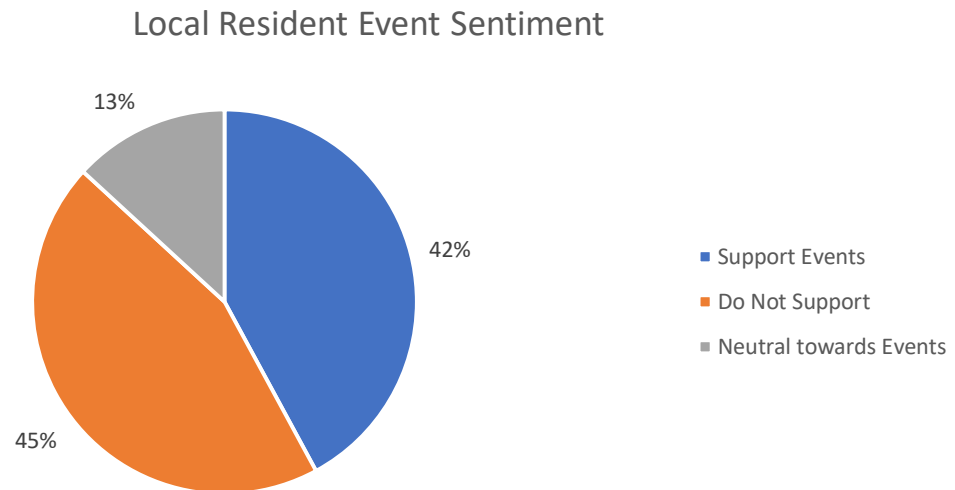
Local Residents

A total of **76** submissions were received from individuals who identified as living locally to the Iveagh Gardens. Of these, and as presented in **Figure 6** overleaf, 32 expressed support for events (42%), 34 expressed a lack of support for events (45%) and 10 expressed neutral sentiment (13%).

Of those who expressed support, key comments included enjoyment of attending concerts or other events in the Gardens, behaviour of attendees and the contribution they bring to the local economy

and Dublin’s cultural offer. Conversely, those who expressed a lack of support cited impact on accessibility to the park for local residents and workers, excessive build times for events and suitability of alternative venues in the city.

Figure 6. Sentiment Analysis (Local Residents)



The Friends of Iveagh Gardens

A detailed submission was received from the **Friends of Iveagh Gardens**. Five broad themes are covered:

- Engagement between the OPW and the local community and local representatives;
- Staff shortages;
- Opening hours of the Gardens;
- Shortening mid-summer events, including through reducing gate restrictions, event footprints and build / take down times; and
- Improvements to infrastructure within the Gardens.

The submission was of the opinion that the Gardens are sometimes closed before published closing times, and that opening hours of the Gardens differ to other green spaces in Dublin. The number of days in which access to the Gardens was restricted for the public is detailed, with a request for this to be shortened. A number of recommendations and suggestions are made, including measures to reduce the time taken for build/takedown periods before and after events, and maintaining access through all gates through management and security processes during events.

A request is made for event organisers and promoters to engage with all relevant stakeholders and the local community and “demonstrate a high level of commitment to addressing their reasonable needs”.

Aiken Promotions

Aiken Promotions is a music promoter operating in Ireland. The company began running events in the Iveagh Gardens in 2007 with the inaugural Comedy Festival, which then expanded in 2010 with the

first Music Festival. Submissions on behalf of Aiken Promotions advocate the continuation of events to ensure that the arts are appropriately represented in the Gardens.

- Since 2010, when Aiken Promotions started running music shows in addition to the Comedy Festival, approximately 800,000 people have come to their events in Iveagh Gardens.
- The Music Festival provides an opportunity to showcase Irish musicians. Of the 80 musical performances that have occurred since 2010, 34 were by Irish artists.
- The Comedy Festival has been an extremely important cultural event on Dublin's annual events calendar and has enabled the fostering of new Irish comedic talent.
- Iveagh Gardens provides the perfect platform for an act to perform to a capacity audience in a central city location and enhances the night-time economy of the city.
- The events employ at least 123 short-term staff on an annual basis and provide direct employee tax contributions of approximately €1 million.
- Aiken Promotions have contributed approximately €7 million for the supply of goods and services, helping to further sustain jobs in the sector.
- The venue attracts all ages from all backgrounds from across Ireland and further afield, and provides good provisions for those with access needs.
- Events help to raise the profile of the Iveagh Gardens.

Aiken Promotions stresses its commitment to working with the OPW to find solutions for all stakeholders, whilst at all times ensuring that the health and safety of all users and visitors to the Iveagh Gardens is never compromised.

Equinox Events

Equinox Events is responsible for organising a number of large-scale public consumer and private corporate events in Ireland, including Taste of Dublin. Almost half a million visitors have attended Taste of Dublin since it was first held at Iveagh Gardens in 2007. Equinox Events supports the continuation of events in the Gardens, noting:

- The Iveagh Gardens is one of a small number of spaces available for such events to be held in the city centre, contributing to income and footfall for local businesses.
- A number of attendees to Taste of Dublin (and other events) having never had the chance or opportunity to visit the Iveagh Gardens before.
- Due to its location, the Iveagh Gardens is easily accessible by public transport including Luas, Dart and bus, ensuring accessibility to all members of the public.
- Hosting events in a central location contributes to enjoyment of living in a vibrant and entertaining city as well as ensuring that it maintains its appeal to visitors from further afield.
- Fees paid to the OPW by event organisers provide an income stream that allows for ongoing conservation across all OPW sites.

Elected Representatives

A small number of elected representatives made submissions to the consultation. Key themes and views raised regarding the impact of public events in Iveagh Gardens are summarised below.

- Ivana Bacik TD (Labour)
- Eddie McGuinness (Labour)
- Councillor Mannix Flynn (Independent)

Ivana Bacik TD

Ivana Bacik TD provided a submission both as a public representative for Dublin Bay South and as a local resident in Portobello. Key points raised, informed by engagement with the OPW, Friends of Iveagh Gardens, Portobello Resident Association and local residents, include:

- Recognition of the role of the Gardens in providing access to green space particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic;
- Need for protection of the Gardens' biodiversity;
- The principle of keeping the Gardens "freely open to the public as extensively as possible";
- Recognition of the importance of the Gardens "as a performance venue and community gathering space" and increased footfall this provides;
- The need for "careful balance" between these competing points, particularly when events are charged;
- Limiting closures of the Gardens for private events during summer months, in terms of numbers of days the Gardens are closed and the extent of space within the Gardens that is used for such events; and
- Welcome of freely accessible public community events/festivals within the Gardens.

Eddie McGuinness

Similar comments and views were raised by Eddie McGuinness, a Labour Party Representative and candidate for the 2024 Local Elections. His submission also incorporates viewpoints from his roles as a professional event planner, creative director of festivals, local resident and founder / chair of the resident community garden committee in Iveagh Trust Kevin St.

He notes he has engaged with local residents, the Portobello Residents Association, the Friends of Iveagh Gardens and other local stakeholders, as well as the OPW, regarding future plans for the Gardens, and welcomes the consultation opportunity.

- The Gardens are a unique green outdoor setting in the city centre, and an important amenity for those living and working in the area;
- Importance of access to the Gardens during the COVID-19 pandemic, particularly those without private gardens;
- Need to protect the Garden's biodiversity and wildlife;
- Ensuring the Gardens remain freely open to the public as extensively as possible;
- Reducing the number of days on which access is restricted when not required, particularly related to build periods and the volume of dates that access to the Gardens is closed or restricted, and the management of deliveries and set-up processes;
- Recognition of the importance of the Gardens as a performance venue and community gathering space, as an exceptional and unique venue;
- Welcomes greater use of the Gardens for freely accessible public community events and festivals;
- Positive impact of increased visitors and usage; and
- Importance of striking a balance between events that bring more people into the Gardens to visit, and the principle of preserving access for the public as far as possible.

Cllr Mannix Flynn

Two submissions were received from Cllr Mannix Flynn. Key points raised by Cllr Flynn include:

- Objection to the closure of the Gardens for events, noting the negative impact upon the local community of restricting access to the Gardens;
- Noting the duty of care role the OPW has for the Gardens as well as the local community;
- As an attendee of numerous events, recognition of its location “in the heart of the city”; and
- Notes that the Gardens “is a fantastic resource in the city, brilliantly situated and should be utilised for the benefit of all”.

Stock Responses

It is noted that two ‘stock’ responses, or variations of, were submitted as part of the consultation. As these were submitted by individuals, they are included within the analysis set out below. **Table 1** sets out two key phrases from the two stock responses and the frequency of which they were used.

Table 1. Stock Response Example Text

Phrase / Response	Frequency
<i>I would like to express my support for the continuation of events</i>	130
<i>I’m writing to voice my support for the continuation of the Comedy & Music events every summer at Iveagh Gardens</i>	107

An example stock response is presented below for information:

To Whom it May Concern I would like to express my support for the continuation of events being staged in the Iveagh Gardens. Dublin is very lucky to have the Iveagh Gardens, but without the events that are held there each year only those lucky enough to live or work in their vicinity would get to enjoy them. Accordingly, I hope events in the Iveagh Gardens continue for many years to come. Regards XXX