

Greenspace Use and Attitudes Survey 2017

Research findings: Executive summary



greenspace scotland, Scottish Natural Heritage,
and Central Scotland Green Network Trust

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Foreword

Greenspaces make a big difference to our quality of life and quality of place. An extensive body of evidence demonstrates the benefits they provide in terms of health and wellbeing, safer and stronger communities, active travel and play, economic development and inward investment, as well as a host of environmental services like climate change adaptation, air quality and natural flood management. They really are our natural health service, our children's outdoor classrooms and our cities green lungs...or are they?

The 2017 survey found that greenspace matters – over 90% of respondents agreed that it is important to have greenspace in their local area. Nearly half (43%) of urban residents visit their local greenspace once a week or more often, and only 4% said they never visit local greenspaces.

But all is not well with Scotland's greenspaces, compared to the results in 2011, there has been a significant decrease in those saying that greenspace meets their needs (from 82% in 2011 to 76% in 2017) and a similar reduction in those saying they are very satisfied with the quality of their local greenspace (from 40% in 2011 to 23% in 2017).

Perhaps even more worrying, is the finding that 40% of people think the quality of their local greenspace has reduced in the last 5 years (up from 33% in 2011); this figure rises to 50% for people living in the 15% most deprived areas (up from 35% in 2011).

The survey also found that local greenspaces continue to fall short of people's expectations for them to be good places for children to play, safe spaces for physical activity, and somewhere to relax and unwind.

Quality impacts on greenspace use – quality ratings and greenspace use both peaked in 2009, since then the percentage of people using greenspace weekly has fallen by 20 percentage points, from 63% (2009) to 43% (2017). These downward trends also mirror closely cuts in local authority budgets. The Improvement Service benchmarking data shows that annual expenditure by Scottish local authorities on parks and greenspace has fallen steadily from £190 million in 2010/11 to £167 million in 2014/15.¹

There is an urgent need for action to reverse these depressing declines in greenspace use and quality – and the negative impacts that they will have on our health, our communities and our environment. There are willing partners in communities across Scotland; encouragingly, the survey found significant increases in people wanting to have more of a say in how their greenspace is managed and to get involved in activities to improve their local greenspace.

The survey findings are very timely being published shortly after the launch of 'A Nation with Ambition' – the Government's programme for Scotland.² This includes commitments to build an Active Nation and expand greenspace through building on the support for the Central Scotland Green Network, and notes that activity will include 'improving the quality of publicly owned greenspaces for recreation and community use'.

greenspace scotland and our partners will use these research findings to continue to work towards our goal that everyone living and working in urban Scotland has easy access to quality greenspaces that meet local needs and improve their quality of life – and to support delivery of the Central Scotland Green Network.

Julie Procter

Chief Executive, greenspace scotland

¹ http://www.improvementservice.org.uk/benchmarking/documents/2017_culture_leisure.pdf

² <http://www.gov.scot/Publications/2017/09/8468>

Summary

Many people in Scotland live near to urban greenspaces, such as parks, play spaces, gardens, playing fields and woodland. Well-designed, connected and managed greenspaces make towns and cities more pleasant places in which to live and can encourage healthy, active lifestyles by giving people an opportunity to enjoy the outdoors close to home and providing children with places to play. Greenspace is an important part of the urban landscape; providing green infrastructure that can contribute to climate change mitigation and adaptation, protection against flooding and erosion as well as biodiversity conservation.

The 2017 Greenspace Use and Attitudes Survey is a quantitative survey which provides an up-to-date understanding of public use, expectations and attitudes relating to urban greenspace in Scotland. This is the fifth time the survey has been commissioned, with previous survey waves in 2004, 2007, 2009 and 2011, and so the results provide valuable trend data on people's use and attitudes to urban greenspace.

The online survey gathered information from 1,000 respondents across urban Scotland. The sample included 800 people living in the Central Scotland Green Network (CSGN) area and 130 respondents living in the 15% most deprived areas. It should be noted that previous survey waves used a telephone rather than an on-line survey method.

Key findings include:

Greenspace matters

Greenspace is important to people, with 92% of respondents agreeing to some extent that it is important to have greenspace in their local area. Nearly two-thirds (63%) said it was very important, but this represents a fall from 2011 (80%).

Declining frequency of using local urban greenspaces

Urban greenspaces are popular outdoor destinations, with nearly half (43%) of urban residents visiting their local greenspace once a week or more often. This is, however, a decrease since 2011 (54%) and continues the downward trend in decreasing frequency of weekly greenspace use which peaked in 2009 when nearly two-thirds (63%) of urban Scots reported that they used their local greenspace once a week or more often. People are still using their local greenspaces but less often; with increases in the proportion of respondents visiting 3-4 and 1-2 times a month.

Between 2004 and 2011, the proportions of respondents living in the 15% most deprived areas who reported that they used their greenspace weekly remained lower than the overall urban sample; in 2017, the percentages were the same (43%). However, the 'gap' has been closed as a result of a reduction in weekly use among the overall population, rather than by increasing use amongst people living in the 15% most deprived areas.

Proximity to greenspace matters

People who live within a 5 minute walk of their local greenspace are significantly more likely (61%) to visit once a week or more often, compared to those living further away (40% for those who live 5 to 10 minutes walk away and 18% for people living 11 to 20 minutes away).

Almost half (44%) of urban Scots reported that they live within a 5 minute walk of their nearest greenspace, with a further third (30%) living 5 to 10 minutes walk away.

These findings are particularly important in relation to the Scottish Government's national indicator to improve access to local greenspace. The indicator measure is the 'percentage of adults within 5 minutes walking distance of their nearest greenspace'. The source for this indicator is the Scottish

Household Survey which covers all of Scotland (urban and rural). Currently, the indicator shows that 67% of adults in Scotland live within a 5 minute walk of greenspace.

The findings from this survey indicate that fewer urban Scots live within a 5 minute walk of greenspace (compared to the Scottish average). The survey also identifies a strong correlation between frequency of use and living less than 5 minutes walk away from greenspace.

Quality matters

40% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that 'the quality of my local greenspace has reduced in the past 5 years' (up from 33% in 2011). This figure rises to 50% for respondents from the 15% most deprived areas (up from 35% in 2011). A similar significant increase was seen for respondents living in the CSGN area with 42% saying that the quality of their local greenspace had reduced in the past 5 years (compared to 34% in 2011).

Regular greenspace users seem to be more aware of falling quality standards in Scotland's parks and greenspaces, with respondents who visit their greenspace once or week or more often being more likely to strongly agree that the quality of their local greenspace had reduced compared to people who visited every 2-3 months (21% and 9%).

Whilst most respondents (74%) said they were satisfied to some extent with the quality of their local greenspace, this is a significant decrease from 2011 (80%). The percentage indicating that they were very satisfied has fallen sharply since 2011 (from 40% in 2011 to 23% in 2017 for the overall sample).

Do local greenspaces meet people's needs?

Respondents who think that their local greenspace meets their needs are significantly more likely to visit once a week or more often (50%) than those who do not (29%).

Whilst most respondents (76%) said that their local greenspace meets their needs, this is a significant decrease from 2011 (82%). The results are lower for respondents from the 15% most deprived areas; with two-thirds (65%) considering that their local greenspace meets their needs.

The gap between expectations of greenspace and local experience

Respondents were asked to respond to a number of statements about their expectations of greenspace in general and then about their experience or perceptions of how well their local greenspace met these expectations.

For all of the statements there was a significant difference between expectations and local experience, for example:

- 77% strongly agreed that greenspaces should be places where you can relax and unwind, but only 43% strongly agreed their local greenspace was
- 72% of people strongly agreed that greenspaces should be safe places to encourage physical activity, but only 45% strongly agreed their local greenspace was a safe place for physical activity
- 71% of people strongly agreed that good quality greenspaces make an area a great place to live, but only 36% strongly agreed that their local greenspace makes the area a great place to live

Expectations and perceptions were generally higher among people who visit their greenspace once a week or more often, who live less than 5 minutes walk away and/or are very satisfied with the quality of their local greenspace.

Older respondents had higher expectations that greenspace should be good places to relax and unwind, attractive places, good places for children to play, opportunities to see nature, good places to meet others from the local community, and make an area a great place to live.

People with a disability or illness were significantly less likely to strongly agree that their local greenspaces are places to relax and unwind, safe spaces to encourage physical activity, attractive places, good places for children to play, and make their area a great place to live. Respondents living in the 15% most deprived areas have similar expectations of greenspace as the full urban sample. In previous survey waves, they have, however, been less likely than the full sample to report that their experience of local greenspace meets expectations. In comparison, the 2017 survey shows a convergence for many attitude statements in the percentage of both the full sample and the sub-sample respondents living in the 15% most deprived areas who strongly agreed that expectations have been met. Again, this appears to reflect a fall in ratings from the full sample, rather than an improvement in perceptions of local greenspace among respondents in the 15% most deprived areas.

Across all statements, there has been a general downward trend in both expectations and perceptions, from 2009 and 2011, to 2017 – and a statistically significant decrease between 2011 and 2017.

Greenspaces are great places for children to play – or are they?

Greenspace conjures up images of children playing outside. Whilst 70% of respondents strongly agreed that greenspaces should be good places for children to play, only 43% strongly agreed their local greenspace was a good place for children to play.

Perceptions that their local greenspace was a good place for children to play, were significantly lower for respondents living within the CSGN area (40% compared to 52% outwith the CSGN area). Significant variances were also seen within the CSGN sub-areas, with, for example, only 33% in the Forth Valley area agreeing strongly.

There were also significant differences in responses from different age groups, with younger respondents (25-34 age group) least likely to strongly agree with the expectation statement 'greenspaces should be good places for children to play'. Only 37% in this age group agreed strongly that their local greenspace was a good place for children to play (compared to 50% of those aged 65+). This finding is particularly important because it is the age group most likely to have young children.

The survey did not identify whether respondents had children but it would be interesting in future waves of the survey to explore responses from households with and without children; and also through other surveys to explore the views of children.

Having a say about greenspace management

Half of all respondents agreed to some extent that they would like to have 'more of a say in how their greenspace is managed'. For respondents from the 15% most deprived areas, this figure rises to nearly two-thirds (60%).

Compared to the 2011 results, there has been an increase across the board in people wanting to have more of a say in how their greenspace is managed, this is seen most strongly in the responses from people living in the 15% most deprived areas. One-third (34%) of respondents from the 15% most deprived areas agreed strongly that they would like to have more of a say in how their greenspace is managed (up from 20% in 2011); this is significantly higher than in other areas (18%) or in the overall sample (20%).

Respondents in the younger age groups (31% of those aged 16-24 and 22% of those aged 25-34) were also more likely to agree strongly than older age groups (21% of those aged 35-44 and 45-54 and 17% aged 55-64, and 13% aged 65+). Perhaps not surprisingly, higher proportions of those who visit their local greenspace once a week or more often (26%) also agreed strongly, compared to less frequent greenspace users.

Getting involved with greenspace

Interest in getting involved with greenspace extended beyond just 'having a say' with nearly half (43%) agreeing or strongly agreeing that they would like to 'get involved with activities to help improve my local greenspace (and 49% of people living in the 15% most deprived areas). Over a quarter (27%) of respondents living in the 15% most deprived areas agreed strongly with this statement (compared to 16% in other areas and 17% in overall sample). Again, regular greenspace users are more likely to agree strongly that they would like to get involved in activities to help improve their local greenspace.

These findings have important implications for volunteering, the development of Friends groups, as well as for the opportunities available for community management and ownership under the provisions of the Community Empowerment Act.

Grow your own

The survey also repeated questions first asked in 2011 about growing your own fruit and vegetables. Just under a quarter (24%) of respondents grow their own; a decrease from 32% in 2011. Conversely, there was an increase in growing from respondents living in the 15% more deprived areas (20% grow their own in 2017, compared to 14% in 2011). This may reflect the growth of community gardens and stalled spaces³ growing projects which have been supported in more deprived areas.

Most people (87%) who grow their own do it in their own garden; with 7% growing in an allotment and 2% in community gardens.

Half of respondents (50%) who do not currently grow their own would like to do so. Lack of a garden is cited as the main barrier (44%), followed by lack of gardening skills (32%), don't have time (26%) and can't get an allotment (14%).

These results provide useful insight for local authorities starting to prepare Allotment and Food Growing Strategies as required by part 9 of the Community Empowerment Act.

Wider context

The 2017 greenspace use and attitude survey provides a very useful insight into current use of greenspace and trends in relation to use and attitudes. The findings will be particularly valuable to parks and greenspace managers, as well as organisations who are seeking to progress policy priorities in relation to physical activity, mental health, active travel, community empowerment, planning and green infrastructure. The report is also very timely in relation to Scottish Government priorities set out in 'A Nation with Ambition' and the delivery of the Central Scotland Green Network as Europe's largest greenspace project.

Survey method and sample

The online survey was conducted among a representative sample of 1,000 adults (aged 16 and over) living in urban areas in Scotland (i.e. those living in towns or cities with over 3,000 residents).

The sample was provided by the panel provider, Research Now, and the survey was administered by Why Research. The survey period lasted from 21st June until 11th July 2017. To ensure that the sample was representative, quotas were set on gender, age and socio-economic grouping to reflect the Scottish adult population (as per the 2011 census data).

³ Stalled spaces are typically sites scheduled for development for housing or business but where development has 'stalled' due to economic or other factors; it is also sometimes used to refer to projects developed on derelict or vacant land. Architecture and Design Scotland led the Stalled Spaces Scotland programme to support temporary or meanwhile uses of these spaces <http://www.ads.org.uk/stalled-spaces-scotland/>

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greenspace scotland, Jubilee House, Forthside Way, Stirling FK8 1QZ
www.greenspacescotland.org.uk | info@greenspacescotland.org.uk | @greenspacescot

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