

# quality greenspace ↘

To find a greenspace team or project in your area, visit [www.greenspacescotland.org.uk/projects](http://www.greenspacescotland.org.uk/projects)

## by definition

**Quality greenspace** is defined as greenspace which is 'fit for purpose'.

This means it is:

- in the right place and easily accessible
- safe, inclusive and welcoming
- well maintained and actively managed.

Above all, it meets current local needs and is flexible enough to continue to meet these needs in future.

## further reading

Other booklets you might find useful in this series are:

- Families and young people
- Children and play
- Housing
- Regeneration



Access to quality greenspaces encourages physical activity and helps us unwind. Unfortunately many greenspaces are 'green deserts' devoid of interest, encouraging anti-social behaviour and promoting fears of safety.

# greenspace scotland ↘

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05



Making the links

# greenspace & health and well-being



  
transforming urban spaces into people places

supported by



  
transforming urban spaces into people places

## health and well-being ↘

**Health is not just an absence of disease – it is physical, social, emotional and spiritual well-being. Our physical health and mental well-being are inextricably linked, with our mental health directly impacting on our physical being and vice versa.**

Exercise is good for us not only because it means we are fitter but also because it makes us feel better about ourselves and life in general. In the same way, if we are mentally fit, we are better prepared to cope with illness and the day to day strains of normal life.

### **Greenspaces encourage physical activity**

Quality greenspace contributes to our health by encouraging us to undertake physical activity. Studies show that physical activity undertaken in a natural environment is associated with increased life span,

a sense of greater well-being, fewer symptoms of depression, increased mental agility, lower rates of smoking and substance misuse and an increased ability to function at work and home. Walking is now recognised as one of best ways to improve physical health and mental well-being. People taking exercise in greenspaces are also more likely to sustain their exercise programme than those using a gym.

### **Greenspaces have a calming effect and aid recovery**

Greenspace helps our mental well-being by providing us with somewhere to relax and unwind, a place where we can restore our batteries and take time out from the stresses of the day. Studies show that simply coming into contact with nature enhances our spiritual, sensual and aesthetic awareness, producing a calming effect. Patients who look out on greenspace

have even been shown to recover more quickly than those who don't. Because of its therapeutic qualities, greenspace activity is increasingly being used as part of programmes for people with mental and / or physical health difficulties.

### **Greenspace empowers people**

Practical involvement in greenspace planning, development and management empowers people and provides a sense of achievement and pride.

### **Greenspaces combat isolation**

In today's society, loneliness and isolation are both a cause and symptom of depression. Quality greenspaces help combat this by providing places where people can come together and interact with others in a neutral and safe environment.

## across urban scotland ↘

- Many greenspace projects now organise **'Paths to Health'** programmes, often linked to GP referral schemes. Results have been significant with participants recording lowered blood pressure, increased physical fitness and enjoyment through being able to meet and socialise with new people.

- In **Glasgow**, clients from Momentum (an organisation which runs a 'back to work' programme) have been volunteering on greenspace projects. Participants say they enjoy the therapeutic nature of the work and that it enables them to develop skills in a safe non-pressurised environment.

- In **Larbert near Falkirk**, former hospital land has been transformed into community and amenity woodlands with paths for the recreational benefit of the residents of Care in the Community

housing units, as well as for the local community. Gardens, a sensory area, amenity areas and health walks around and within the site have also been developed with the community.

- In **Aberdeen**, a project is underway to revitalise two acres of abandoned allotments for community use. The main elements will be public gardens, play areas, wildlife areas, a horticultural area to promote healthy eating and a composting scheme. The aim of the project will be to help encourage healthy lifestyles and improve the skills of local people including vulnerable adults.

- In **Bothwell, Hamilton** resurfacing a muddy footpath, clearing shrubs and adding lighting has provided a safe route to school. Since completion there has been a significant rise in the number of children walking and cycling to school.



"I didn't leave the house for 11 years. Being involved in this project is helping to give me my confidence back." Momentum volunteer

## looking forward ↘

- Reports show that people in the lowest socio-economic groups are more likely to be physically inactive, and the same people are also likely to live in the worst environments. Conversely, we know that people are more likely to undertake outdoor physical activity if they have a safe, accessible, local greenspace which meets their needs. Health improvement plans therefore need to adopt an holistic approach and include the provision and promotion of quality greenspace as part of their core strategy.

- To ensure greenspaces fulfil their health potential, they must meet the needs of local people. Community Planning Partnerships must have the provision of quality greenspace as part of their remit and ensure that health professionals are involved in decisions about the

greenspace resource. The local community must be involved in the design, planning and ongoing management decisions for their local greenspace and to ensure that they are 'fit for purpose'.

- Quality greenspace and its associated benefits needs to be recognised as part of a preventative approach to health, with increased resources applied to health promotion.

- GPs should be further encouraged to work in cooperation with activity and greenspace professionals to increase 'exercise by prescription'.

- Resources need to be allocated to commission a clinically robust evidence base for the health impacts of greenspace.



Participants in health walks in Inverclyde say they have enjoyed making new friends and have noted a reduction in blood pressure as well as increased overall fitness