

Research Summary: Early Findings

1.1 New research from Fields in Trust demonstrates a direct and statistically significant link between publicly accessible parks and green spaces and health and well being.

- Based on new analysis of existing data from Defra and MENE and our own primary survey (sample size 4,033) we have established, for the first time at the national level, a direct and statistically significant link between an individual's use of parks or green spaces and an improvement in health and wellbeing (covering General Health and the four ONS wellbeing questions - life satisfaction, sense of worth, happiness and anxiety).
- On average, the more frequently park / green space trips are made, the higher an individual's well being. This is the case even after controlling for a wide range of background factors such as socioeconomic status and region.
- From both sets of data analysed we observe that visiting a park or green space every day is associated with the greatest increase in health and wellbeing. However, visiting at least once a week gives the individual between 64 % and 73% of the benefits to general health and wellbeing.
- The most practical and effective use of an individual's time would be to visit their local park or green space at least once a week in order to gain the majority of the health and wellbeing benefits. This gives us a 'dosage' recommendation for parks and green space - if it is 'Five a day' for fruit and veg then it is 'Once a week' for parks and green spaces.

1.2 Park usage and demographics

- Families are particularly important users of parks and greenspaces, being twice as likely (33%) to be users of parks than non-users (18%).
- Parks have a distinctive and important role in the lives of black and minority ethnic (BAME) groups who use these spaces for children's activities, to meet friends, and to have picnics significantly more than white groups. In addition, a significantly higher proportion of BAME groups also report using parks and greenspaces for team sports compared to white groups, as well as for personal sport and general relaxation or to pass the time.

2 Context of the study

There is a growing body of empirical evidence confirming that parks serve as the 'green lungs' of towns and cities, improving air quality. Access to green space is positive for physical health and mental wellbeing. Parks and green spaces improve community cohesion by offering shared spaces for community connections and to tackle social isolation. An increased focus on environmental impacts has shown that parks and green spaces also provide wildlife habitats with many and varied 'ecosystem service' benefits.

The importance of parks and greenspaces to society is reflected in the policy arena, where the provision of publicly accessible greenspace is a policy issue at multiple levels of central and local government, devolved administration and local council policies (for instance, the Sporting Future Strategy (Department for Culture, Media, and Sport, 2015), child obesity targets (Department of

Health; Welsh Assembly Wellbeing of Future Generations Act), Local Authority Health and Well Being Boards. However, the local authorities who are responsible for funding the provision of publicly accessible green space do not have a statutory obligation to do so. And funding cuts and skills shortages have led to a significant decline in their quality in recent decades.

In response to these challenges, in January 2017 the House of Parliament Communities and Local Government Committee published their report into the value of parks and open green space in the UK. The report discussed the positive contributions that parks and greenspaces provide to the culture and communities in the UK. The report emphasised the need to robustly quantify the benefits that parks and greenspaces provide in ways which are comparable across the UK, and which conform with the evaluation methods used by central government (HM Treasury Green Book) and local authorities.

2.1 The need for robust economic values of the benefits of parks and greenspaces

The CLG Committee outlined as a priority to local authorities and park management organisations that the value of parks and greenspaces be communicated in a way that enables their economic value to be balanced against the costs of provision. The Committee stressed that while “assessing the value of parks to their communities in wider terms can be complex”, it is vital that local authorities are able to “demonstrate the contribution made by parks to broader agendas”. (House of Commons. Communities and Local Government Committee, 2017, paragraph 35, p. 22)

Fields in Trust’s research will ultimately contribute to better and more efficient decisions for shaping future delivery of parks and green spaces, target park services to those who benefit most and those who are currently under-represented within our parks, and aid the process of securing funding priorities for parks and greenspaces.

2.2 Summary of Research Findings

Fields in Trust commissioned Jump X Simetrica to address this call for an assessment of the economic, monetary value of parks and greenspaces in line with the latest knowledge on the health and wellbeing benefits, and in doing so to build towards the “robust and accessible transferrable models which local authorities in England can use to access the value of their parks” that the committee would like to see. This summary represents early findings from the work; the detailed study will be published in a full academic paper which will identify not only details of park and green space usage but will also reveal the results of a new bespoke survey identifying the value placed on parks and green spaces by those who use them.

- These early stage findings are released as Parks and Green Spaces Minister, **Marcus Jones MP**, Minister for Parks and Green Spaces formally responds to the DCLG Select Committee Inquiry into the Future of Public Parks. As part of his response the Minister announced the creation of a ‘**Parks Action Group**’. This advisory panel will include Fields in Trust as a member alongside other green space organisations who are tasked with applying their expertise to inform a new cross-departmental group of government departments. Fields in trust will share our research work with colleagues across the sector to ensure that we value parks and green spaces and take account of the vital contribution they make to local communities.

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