Local greenspaces in everyday life: Visits, quality, and barriers across different groups

The Full Report

December 2025

Natural England Commissioned Report NECR656

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About Natural England

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Report Details

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Foreword

Natural England's (hereafter, "NE") goals include promoting people's access to green and natural spaces as well as contributing to society's wellbeing, enjoyment and prosperity. In 2023, NE's sponsor, Defra, published the Environmental Improvement Plan (EIP), the most recent iteration of the 25 Year Environment Plan (25 YEP). Under the apex goal of the EIP, improving nature, there are 10 sub-goals. The 10th sub-goal of the EIP is to 'enhance beauty, heritage, and engagement with the natural environment'. As part of this, the government committed to 'work across government to fulfil a new and ambitious commitment that everyone should live within 15 minutes' walk of a green or blue space.'

Since the publication of the EIP, Defra has worked with Other Government Departments and Arms-Length Bodies to develop and deliver this commitment in a way that delivers meaningful improvements to the green and blue space people have available within 15 minutes of their front door. Defra has commissioned various analytical pieces to understand what access people in England have within 15 minutes of their home.

The main work in this area to date, has used a network model calculating walking distance to greenspace. An official statistic in development was published on 1st August 2024.

The Adults' People and Nature Survey

Natural England ran the Monitor of Engagement with the Natural Environment (MENE) survey across England from 2009 to 2019. In 2020 the People and Nature Survey (PANS) was created to substitute MENE.

PANS includes a survey specifically for adults (A-PaNS) and another for children (C-PaNS). The A-PaNS survey started running in April 2020 and, at the time of writing, monthly collection of data continues. The A-PaNS collects 2,000-2,100 responses per month, yielding around 25,000 responses a year. Note that the sample is not longitudinal, meaning, respondents are different every month. The A-PaNS includes a total of six question modules, each focusing on different aspects of people's engagement with nature. The raw data can be accessed on UK data service.

Natural England commission a range of reports from external contractors to provide evidence and advice to assist us in delivering our duties. The views in this report are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent those of Natural England.

Executive Summary

This report explores how people in England access, use, and perceive the quality of their local green and natural spaces. It draws on both survey and qualitative data to examine key patterns in greenspace proximity, use, barriers, and perceptions, with a focus on how these factors vary across different groups. The findings provide valuable insights into how greenspaces are used by people, the challenges some groups face in accessing and using these spaces, and potential considerations for future policy and planning.

Key Findings

Access to Greenspaces

- Most people in England (73%) live within a 15-minute walk of their nearest greenspace. However, **access is not universal**, with 27% living beyond this threshold.
- **Proximity is a major determinant of greenspace use**—most people (78–79%) visit their nearest greenspace most often, regardless of how far away it is.
- Access is **not evenly distributed** across the population. White residents, older adults, and those living in less deprived areas were more likely to report good access. In contrast, younger adults (16-39), people from minority ethnic backgrounds, and those with limiting health conditions reported lower access.
- Seasonal variation in greenspace use was relatively modest. **Even in winter, 70% of people reported visiting a greenspace in the past two weeks**, highlighting greenspaces as an important year-round resource.

How People Use Greenspaces

- **Walking is the most common activity** across all greenspaces, making it the cornerstone of greenspace use in England.
- Distance influences **how greenspaces are used**. Local greenspaces (within 1km) are used for routine, everyday activities, whereas more distant spaces (beyond 1km) are more often used for planned, exceptional visits that involve a wider range of activities (e.g., eating out, picnicking, or visiting attractions).
- The type of greenspace also plays a role in **shaping activities**. For example, wildlife watching is most common in nature reserves, while playing with children is more frequent in urban greenspaces.

Perceptions of Greenspace Quality

- The study identified **four distinct groups** based on shared perceptions of greenspace quality, ranging from those who consistently rated their local spaces as high quality to those who viewed them as poor.
- **Perceptions of different aspects of greenspace quality tend to align**, suggesting that spaces perceived as good for one purpose (e.g., relaxation, social connection, physical health) are often rated highly across other dimensions as well.
- Quality perceptions are **not evenly distributed**. People from White ethnic backgrounds and those in rural areas were more likely to report positive perceptions of greenspaces, while those in deprived areas were more likely to report lower quality.
- **Quality and proximity both play a role in greenspace use.** On the whole, those who live closer and rate their greenspaces as higher quality are more likely to visit

frequently. However, one small group (6%) rates their local greenspaces as poor but still visit frequently - suggesting that, for some, **greenspace use remains important despite dissatisfaction with quality.**

Barriers to Use and Encouraging Greater Engagement

- **Barriers to use vary by proximity**. Those living closer to greenspaces were more likely to cite personal reasons (e.g., being too busy, bad weather), while those living further away cited **structural barriers** such as traffic, lack of facilities, safety concerns, and cost.
- **Greenspace quality influences barriers to use.** Poor maintenance, lack of basic amenities (especially toilets), and feeling unsafe were commonly cited reasons for not visiting greenspaces more often.
- The **COVID-19 pandemic** marked a turning point in greenspace use for many—some reported an increase in visits, while others reduced their use due to changing work patterns or accessibility concerns.
- People cited **five key factors that make a greenspace 'high quality'**: 1) feeling safe, 2) being well-maintained and visually appealing, 3) catering to diverse users, 4) being accessible, and 5) supporting the natural environment.

Conclusions

This research highlights the **complementary roles of local and more distant greenspaces**—local spaces are critical for routine outdoor activity, while larger or more specialised spaces provide opportunities for a broader range of experiences. The findings also underscore **the importance of both proximity and quality** in shaping greenspace use and highlight disparities in access and perceptions across different demographic groups. Addressing these issues—whether through improved maintenance, targeted interventions to increase access, or infrastructure investments to support year-round use—could help ensure that greenspaces continue to provide benefits for all communities.

Findings suggest that infrastructure investments aimed at supporting year-round use should focus on elements that improve both comfort and safety, particularly in winter and during poor weather conditions. Qualitative research indicates that covered seating areas, better lighting, and improved drainage on pathways could make greenspaces more usable throughout the year. For example, participants noted that poor lighting discouraged use in winter evenings, while muddy or waterlogged paths made some spaces difficult to navigate after heavy rain. Additionally, better facilities (e.g., toilets) were frequently cited as a factor that would encourage longer and more frequent visits, particularly for families with children and older adults.

Certain groups may benefit more from targeted interventions to increase greenspace access and engagement. The survey findings highlight that people from minority ethnic backgrounds, those in more deprived areas, and individuals with limiting health conditions are more likely to face barriers to greenspace use. Qualitative insights additionally suggested that improving perceptions of safety and ensuring accessibility for disabled users could be particularly impactful. Participants from urban areas mentioned concerns about crime and anti-social behaviour, while others with mobility issues described difficulties accessing greenspaces due to uneven paths and a lack of seating.

Community-led initiatives, such as locally organised walking groups, enhanced maintenance, and clearer signage about accessibility features, may help address these barriers and encourage more equitable greenspace engagement

Contents

Introduction

Background

This report contributes to the growing evidence base that supports Natural England's efforts to understand and reduce the barriers people face in accessing nature across England. Natural England is a non-departmental public body which has a responsibility to promote access to and use of outdoor green and natural spaces of all types.

Natural England's 2020-2025 strategy, Building Partnerships for Nature's Recovery, includes specific five-year aims around promoting access to nature. It will gather evidence on barriers people face accessing natural spaces and the potential benefits of enabling access, both in terms of the improved quality of their personal lives and population health benefits for society which would in turn reduce the burden on the health service. It will also seek to understand how people use and want to use natural outdoor spaces. This will facilitate government policies targeted towards reducing inequality and deprivation.

The Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra), the sponsor of Natural England, has also recently published the Environmental Improvement Plan (EIP). This is the latest version of the 25 Year Environment Plan, one of the goals of which is to 'enhance beauty, heritage and engagement with the natural environment'. As part of this, the government has outlined ambitions to improve access to nature by creating new greenspaces, enhancing existing ones, and supporting more people to benefit from spending time outdoors. Several broad initiatives—such as the Accessible Greenspace Standards and the ongoing monitoring of access to greenspace in England—continue to guide efforts to expand and improve access to natural spaces for all communities.

Since the publication of the EIP in January 2023 Defra has worked with government departments and arm's length bodies such as Natural England to develop and implement policies aimed at supporting this aim, as well as commissioned a range of analysis to improve understanding of the existing levels of access to natural spaces across England and how access can be improved in the future. In this context, Natural England commissioned The National Centre for Social Research (NatCen) to carry out the research that informs this report on how people in England perceive the accessibility of green and natural spaces close to where they live, and how they use them.

Research Objectives

The high-level research objectives of this report are to:

1. Understand the proximity of people to their nearest green and natural space and determine whether barriers to using greenspaces differ depending on proximity to those greenspaces,

2. Identify whether distinct groups of people can be identified who perceive different quality levels of green and natural spaces in their local area and understand whether the quality of local greenspaces matters for people's greenspace use.

3. Understand what people do when visiting green and natural spaces and how the activities they engage differ depending on the distance they travelled, the type of greenspace visited, and the amenities available in those greenspaces.

4. Where people have multiple local greenspaces to choose from, understand what factors influence their choice of greenspace.

Methodology

The People and Nature Surveys for England

The findings for this report use data from Natural England's People and Nature Survey for England. The Adults' People and Nature Surveys (APaNS) for England are long-term social surveys, which measure how people perceive the quality and accessibility of green and nature spaces, how people use them, and how they benefit from them. The surveys measure how these change over time, and how they differ between population groups.

The data is collected through an online panel survey (self-completion questionnaire), which is asked of a nationally representative sample on a continuous basis. It has been conducted continuously since April 2020, although some questions have been added to the survey more recently. Of particular relevance to this report, the questions about how close people are to their nearest greenspace have only been included on APaNS for one year, so this data is based on a smaller sample size and relates only to the most recent year (April 2023 - March 2024).

The survey sample size is large; around 25,000 adults in England respond to the survey each year. However, it also split into six modules, each of which focuses on a different topic and some modules are only asked of a subsample of people. As a result, the sample size for different questions can vary widely. Throughout the report the unweighted sample size at each question is reported alongside all data tables or visualisations.

Descriptive Analysis Methods

The majority of the analysis in this report is based on descriptive statistics (primarily weighted percentages) and cross-tabulations conducted between key outcome variables and relevant secondary characteristics. The socio-demographic characteristics which are used repeatedly in analysis across chapters are described in more detail in Appendix A.

All findings in this report are weighted to be nationally representative of the adult population of England, unless otherwise stated. The exceptions are cases where a module is routed to a specific subgroup of people, for example, people who have not visited a greenspace in the last 14 days.

Where comparisons are made between subgroups of the population, drawing on the cross-tabulations, statistical significance tests have been used to identify whether differences between groups are large enough to have arisen by chance. A statistically significant difference between two groups can be thought of as one that is unlikely to have arisen by chance in this sample if there was no difference in the population. A threshold for statistical significance of 0.001 has been used in this report. This means a result is only considered statistically significant when there is less than one chance in a thousand of this result occurring by chance. This more conservative threshold (than the typically used 0.05) reduces the chance of falsely claiming a result is significant.

All differences between subgroups of the population described in the report were found to be statistically significant – unless specifically stated otherwise.

Some of the analysis in this report also draws on more complex methods. These are introduced in the relevant chapter and further technical details are provided in appendices.

Reporting conventions

In tables and charts throughout this report percentages are presented to zero decimal points to improve readability and because differences smaller than 1% are rarely meaningful. As a result, figures may not add up to 100%. Some tables are also not intended to add up to 100%—for example, where a question is multiple choice—in these cases it is noted in the table heading.

Qualitative Methods

Qualitative methods were used to address the research objectives in Chapter 4.

A total of 21 participants took part across three focus groups (7 per group). A purposive sampling approach was used to ensure the research included breadth and diversity of views and experiences on use of local green and natural spaces. To allow the research to explore the barriers and enablers to the use of local spaces, the sample included only those with at least one green or natural space within 1km or a 15-minute walk of their home. The sample design was based around two primary criteria of particular salience to the research objectives: frequency of use, and whether spaces were perceived as high- or low-quality. A range of other secondary criteria were monitored throughout recruitment.

All three focus groups were carried out remotely via Zoom between mid-December 2024 and early January 2025. Each focus group lasted approximately 90 minutes. Topic guides, designed in collaboration with Natural England, were used to facilitate the three focus groups. The topic guides were designed to allow flexibility in discussions, while ensuring core themes were addressed.

All focus groups were audio recorded with participants' permission and then transcribed verbatim. The transcripts were managed and analysed using NatCen's Framework approach for qualitative data analysis (Ritchie, 2013). This was followed by both thematic and interpretative analysis.

A more detailed description of the qualitative methods is provided in the chapter 4 appendices.

Report Structure

The report is structured into four chapters, each of which addresses a different set of research objectives. Chapters 1 to 3 draw on APaNS data, exploring population-level trends for people in England. Chapter 4 is based on the focus groups conducted with particular types of greenspace users, building on and expanding the findings in chapters 1 – 3.

Chapter 1

This chapter examines the proximity of green and natural spaces to where people live in England, focussing on whether these fall within a 5-minute walk, a 6 to 15-minute walk, or more than 15 minutes' walk from people's homes. It then explores how perceptions of greenspace proximity vary across different socio-demographic groups, whether barriers to spending time in green or natural spaces differ depending on people's proximity to their nearest greenspace, and finally, whether perceptions of proximity to greenspaces differs with the seasons.

Chapter 2

The second chapter identifies four distinct segments of people in England, based on shared perceptions of the quality greenspaces in their local area. It then describes how people's perceptions of greenspace quality vary for different socio-demographic groups, as well as other individual characteristics such as dog ownership. Finally, it explores how important greenspace quality perceptions and proximity are in explaining how often people in England use their local greenspaces, as well as what other secondary factors beyond quality and proximity matter in explaining greenspace use.

Chapter 3

Chapter 3 describes the activities people take part in during their visits to green and natural spaces and how these differ depending on how far they have travelled to visit this space. It also explores whether people see their visits as either routine or exceptionally memorable and how these different types of experience are distributed across visits to local and more distant greenspaces and depending upon the activity engaged in during the visit. Finally, it describes how the type of green or natural spaces visited, as well as the perceived quality of amenities in those greenspaces, are associated with the activity they engage in there.

Chapter 4

The final chapter in the report, drawing on findings from the focus groups, builds on the results described in Chapters 1 to 3. It addresses how people use greenspaces close to their home, what factors influence people in choosing between different available greenspaces, enablers and barriers to using greenspaces within 15 minutes' walk of their home, what factors matter to people when considering the quality of greenspaces, as well as what could encourage people to make more use of those spaces.

Chapter 1: Trends, Barriers, and Opportunities in Greenspace Access and Usage

This chapter examines how easily people in England can access green and natural spaces, highlighting which groups in the population have better—or worse—access. It also explores the barriers that prevent people from making the most of these spaces, while uncovering how challenges differ depending on the proximity of greenspaces to people's homes. Finally, the chapter looks at seasonal patterns in greenspace access and use, providing valuable insights into how these spaces can continue to benefit communities year-round.

Research Objectives

The research objectives of Chapter One are to:

1. Examine how close green and natural spaces are to where people live in England, measured by the proportion of the population reporting access within a 5-minute walk, a 6 to 15-minute walk, or more than 15 minutes from their homes.
2. Explore whether perceptions of greenspace proximity vary across different socio-demographic groups.
3. Understand how barriers to spending time in green and natural spaces differ depending on how far people live from these spaces.
4. Investigate whether perceptions of access to and use of the nearest greenspace change with the seasons.

Access to Green and Natural Spaces

Proximity to green and natural spaces plays a critical role in shaping how much time people spend outdoors. The closer these spaces are to people's homes, the more likely they are to visit regularly, benefiting from the physical, mental, and social advantages these spaces provide.

In the Adults' People and Nature Survey (APaNS), people were asked to think broadly about what counts as a green or natural space, encompassing a variety of landscapes and settings (including what is termed 'blue spaces'):

- **The countryside:** Farmland, woodlands, hills, rivers, and other rural landscapes.
- **The coast**: Beaches, cliffsides, and activities that take place on or by the open sea.
- **Urban greenspaces**: Parks, canals, and other green areas within towns and cities.

However, people were explicitly asked to exclude their own private gardens, focussing instead on publicly accessible spaces that are shared by communities. This approach ensures that the findings reflect experiences of spaces that are accessible to everyone, highlighting their role in promoting community well-being and equity in access.

Walking Distance to People's Nearest Green and Natural space

To understand what proportion of people live near to a green and natural space, the APaNS survey asked people to estimate how long it takes them "to walk to your nearest local green and natural space". The findings reveal that the majority of people in England (73%) report living within a 15-minute walk of their nearest green or natural space (Figure 1). However, a sizeable minority—27%—reported living more than 15 minutes away, highlighting potential accessibility challenges for some communities. These walking times broadly align with Natural England's greenspace accessibility standards, where a 5-minute walk corresponds approximately to the doorstep and local standards (greenspace within 200m and 300m respectively of the home), and a 15-minute walk to the neighbourhood standard (within 1km).

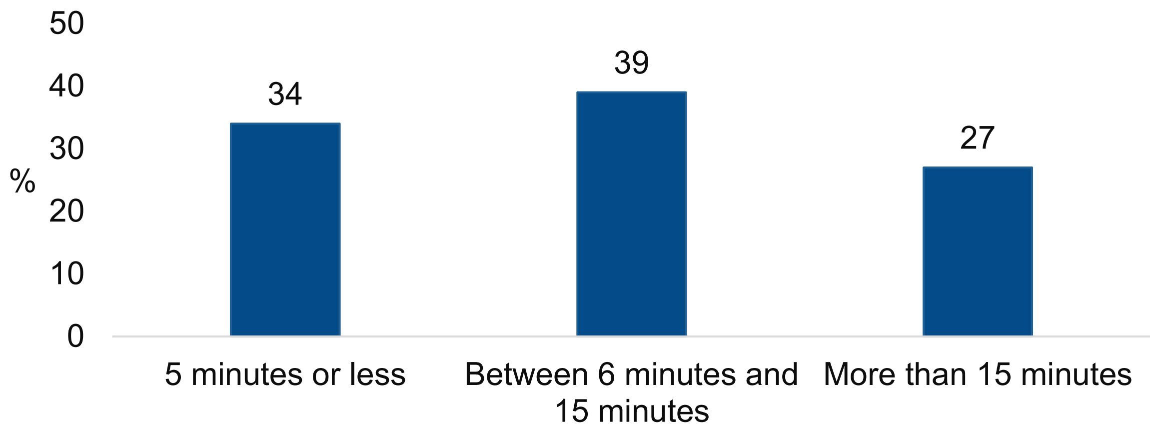


Figure 1: Proportion of population by distance from nearest greenspace (%). The raw data can be accessed on UK data service.

Chart notes

Source: M1_Walk_a. How long does it take you to walk to your nearest local green and natural space?

1. Data collected between April 2023 and March 2024.
2. The sample for this question was 23,966 respondents.
3. Base: all adults in England.

People Are Most Likely To Use Their Nearest Green and Natural Space

Nearly four out of five people (78%) reported that their nearest green or natural space is the one they visit most often. This pattern held true regardless of how close their nearest greenspace was, underscoring the importance of proximity in shaping people's choice of where to spend time outdoors.

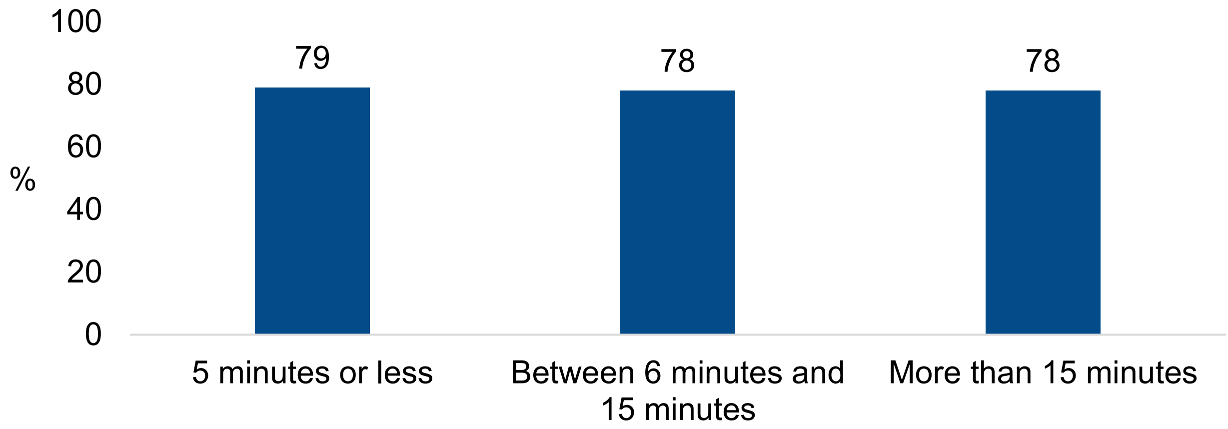


Figure 2: Proportion of the population whose nearest greenspace is the one they use most frequently, by distance to nearest greenspace (%)

Chart notes:

Source: M1_Walk_b. Is this the green and natural space you visit most frequently?

1. Data collected between April 2023 and March 2024.
2. The samples for this question were 5 minutes or less (7,901), Between 6 minutes and 15 minutes (9,634), More than 15 minutes (6,424).
3. Base: all adults in England who did not report they never walk to their nearest greenspace.

Which Groups Have Most Access to Green and Natural Spaces?

Understanding which groups have limited access to green and natural spaces is crucial, as these spaces provide opportunities for regular physical activity and offer significant mental and physical health benefits. Identifying disparities in access can help target efforts to ensure everyone has the chance to benefit from these valuable resources.

Differences in Greenspace Access by Ethnicity

Perceived access to green and natural spaces varied notably by ethnicity. White residents reported better access compared to minority ethnic groups, with Black or Black British and Asian or Asian British individuals reporting the lowest levels of access. As shown in Figure 3, slightly more than a third of White people (36%) reported living within a 5 minutes' walk of their nearest greenspace, compared to just around one in five among both Black or Black British (19%) and Asian or Asian British (23%) groups.

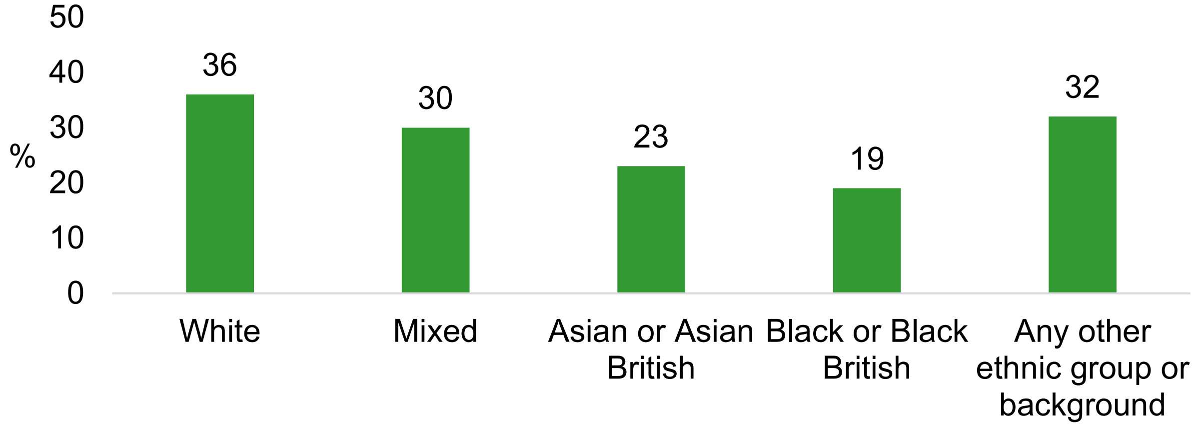


Figure 3: Proportion of people living within 5 minutes' walk of greenspace, by ethnicity (%)

Chart notes:

Source: M1_Walk_a. How long does it take you to walk to your nearest local green and natural space?

1. Data collected between April 2023 and March 2024.
2. The samples for this question were White (20,093), Mixed (492), Asian or Asian British (1,537), Black or Black British (1,182), Any other ethnic group or background (208).
3. Base: all adults in England.
4. For simplicity, this figure does not show all the categories for proximity to greenspaces. A more detailed breakdown can be found in the separate tables Annexe to this report.

Area deprivation and Income Differences in Green and Natural Space Access

Access to green and natural spaces varies significantly depending on levels of deprivation, as measured by the Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD). Please see more details on IMD in Appendix A. People living in less deprived areas report better access compared to those in more deprived areas. For example, over a third (38%) of people in the least deprived areas reported living within a 5-minute walk of a greenspace, compared to just one in four (26%) in the most deprived areas (Figure 4).

A similar, though less pronounced, pattern emerged for household income. Individuals from higher-income households were slightly more likely to report better access to nearby greenspaces than those from lower-income households (Figure 5 - overpage).

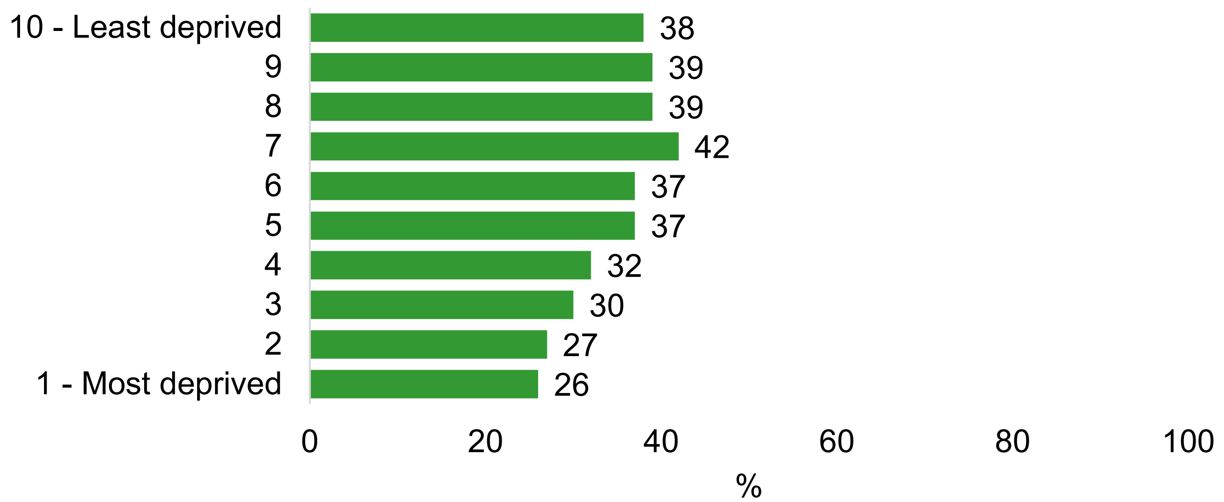


Figure 4: Proportion of people living within 5 minutes' walk from greenspace by IMD decile (%)

Chart notes

Source: M1_Walk_a. How long does it take you to walk to your nearest local green and natural space?

1. Data collected between April 2023 and March 2024.
2. The samples for this question were 10 - Least deprived (1,647), 9 (1,805), 8 (1,859), 7 (1,899), 6 (1,972), 5 (1,944), 4 (2,086), 3 (2,037), 2 (2,019), 1 - Most deprived (2,081).
3. Base: all adults in England.
4. For simplicity, this figure does not show all the categories for proximity to greenspaces. A more detailed breakdown can be found in the separate tables Annexe to this report.

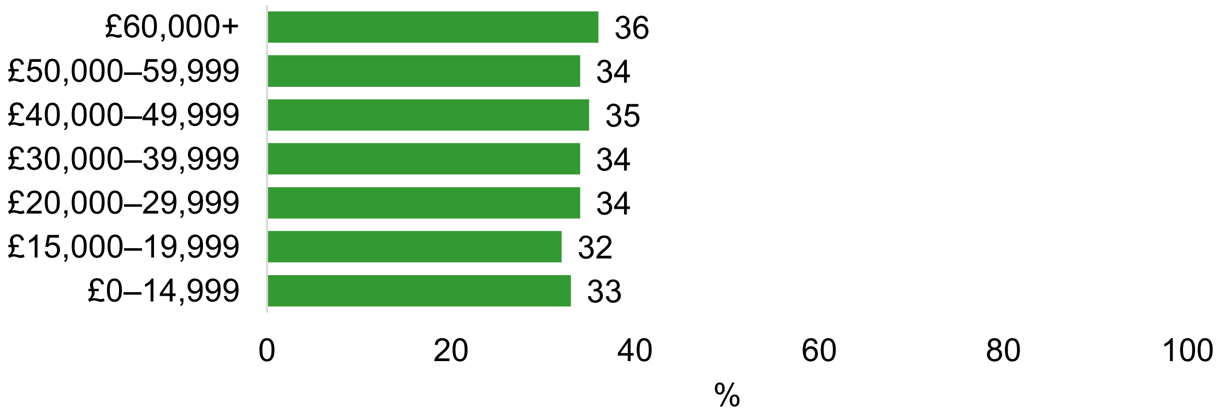


Figure 5: Proportion of population living within 5 minutes' walk from greenspace by income (%)

Chart notes

Source: M1_Walk_a. How long does it take you to walk to your nearest local green and natural space?

1. Data collected between April 2023 and March 2024.
2. The samples for this question were £60,000+ (4,103), £50,000–59,999 (1,967), £40,000–49,999 (2,857), £30,000–39,999 (3,975), £20,000–29,999 (4,847), £15,000–19,999 (2,533), £0–14,999 (3,589).
3. Base: all adults in England.
4. For simplicity, this figure does not show all the categories for proximity to greenspaces. A more detailed breakdown can be found in the separate tables Annexe to this report.

Rural-Urban Differences in Greenspace Access

Residents in rural areas reported significantly better access to green and natural spaces compared to those in urban settings. Half of rural residents (50%) indicated that they could reach their nearest green or natural space within a 5-minute walk, compared to only about a third (31%) of urban residents (Figure 6). In contrast, urban residents were more likely to live further from greenspaces, with a higher proportion reporting that it took more than 15 minutes to walk to their nearest green or natural space.

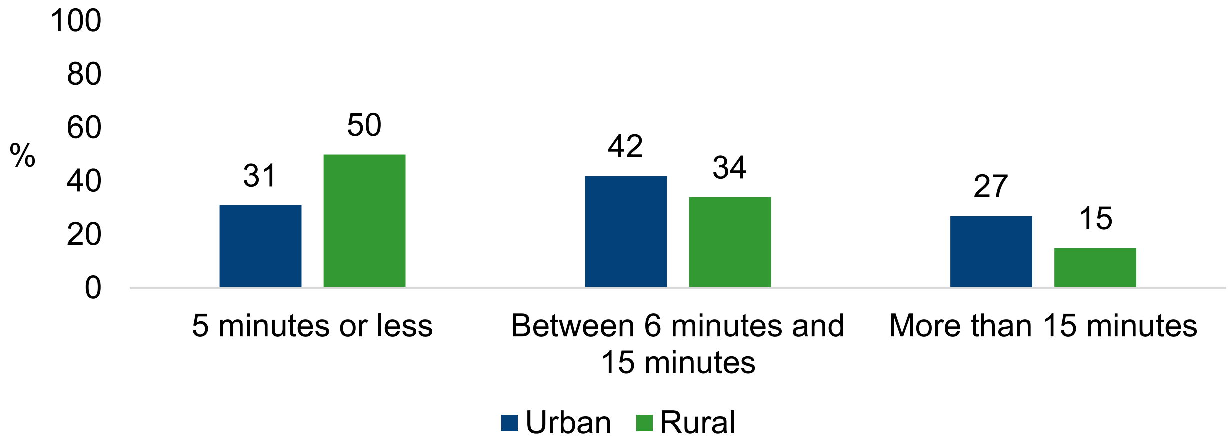


Figure 6: Access to Greenspaces by Urban and Rural Status (%)

Chart notes

Source: M1_Walk_a. How long does it take you to walk to your nearest local green and natural space?

1. Data collected between April 2023 and March 2024.
2. The samples for this question were Urban (16,378), Rural (2,971).
3. Base: all adults in England.

Age Differences in Access to Green and Natural Spaces

Younger adults (aged 16-39) were more likely to report living further away from green and natural spaces compared to older adults (aged 55+). Over one-third (37%) of people aged 25-39 reported living more than 15 minutes away from their nearest greenspace. In contrast, this figure drops to one in six (17%) for those aged 65 and older (Figure 7). This trend highlights that older age groups tend to have better access to greenspaces.

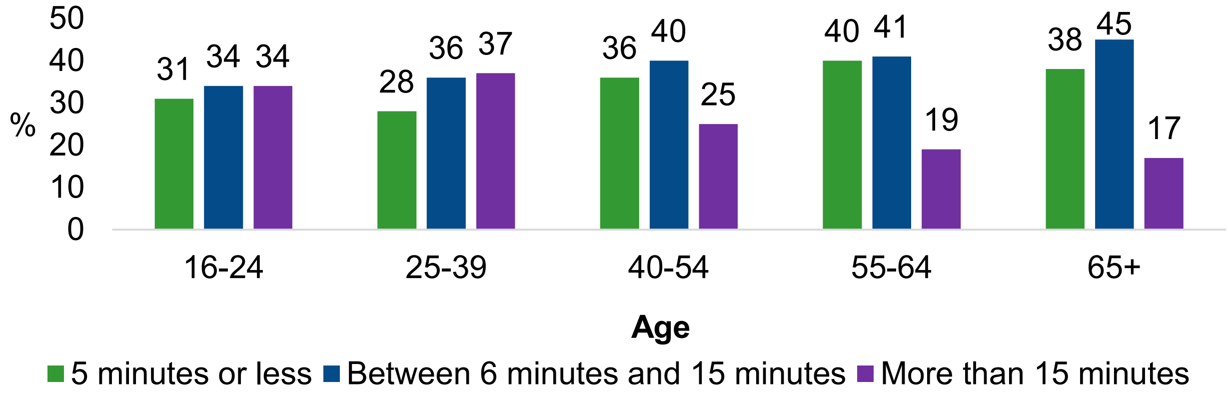


Figure 7: Access to green and natural spaces by age (%)

Chart notes

Source: M1_Walk_a. How long does it take you to walk to your nearest local green and natural space?

1. Data collected between April 2023 and March 2024.
2. The samples for this question were 16-24 (3,229), 25-39 (5,943), 40-54 (5,816), 55-64 (3,760), 65+ (5,218).
3. Base: all adults in England.

Differences in Green and Natural Space Access by Disability

Access to green and natural spaces was notably lower among individuals with more limiting health conditions. Over a third (36%) of people whose health conditions significantly affect their day-to-day activities reported living more than 15 minutes away from their nearest green or natural space. In contrast, only about one in four of people with less limiting conditions (24%) or no health conditions (25%) reported the same (Figure 8). These findings suggest individuals with more limiting health conditions may face greater challenges in accessing greenspaces, either due to physical limitations meaning their walking pace is slower or living at a greater distance from a greenspace.

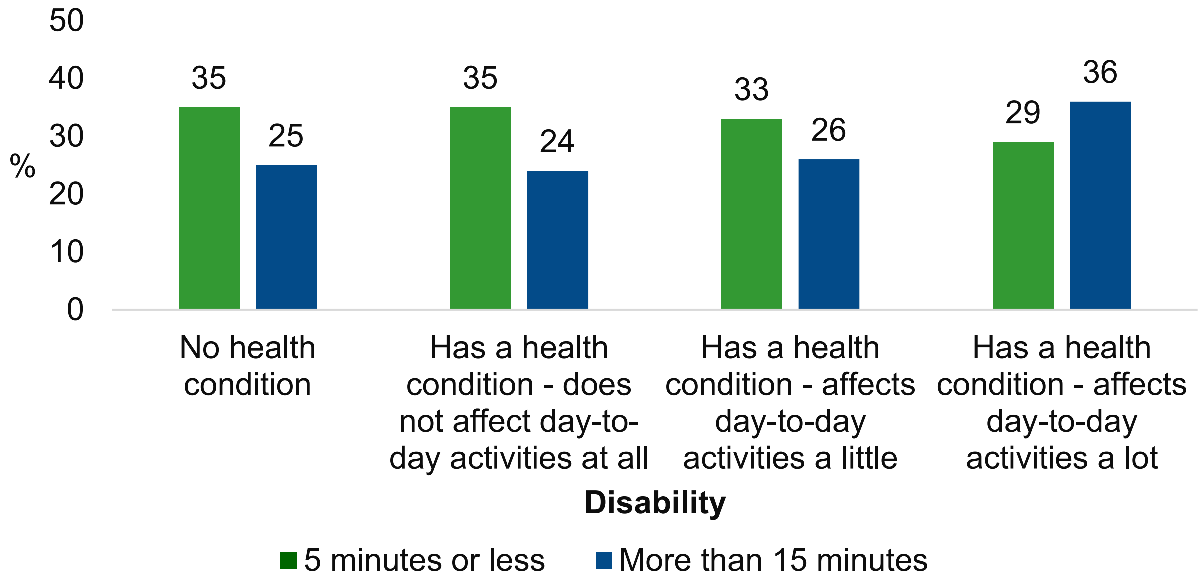


Figure 8: Access to green and natural spaces by disability status (%)

Chart notes

Source: M1_Walk_a. How long does it take you to walk to your nearest local green and natural space?

1. Data collected between April 2023 and March 2024.
2. The samples for this question were No health condition (16,444), Has a health condition - does not affect day-to-day activities at all (1,212), Has a health condition - affects day-to-day activities a little (4,011), Has a health condition - affects day-to-day activities a lot (2,183).
3. For simplicity, this figure does not show all the categories for proximity to greenspaces. A more detailed breakdown can be found in the separate tables Annexe to this report.
4. Base: all adults in England.

Differences in Green and Natural Space Access by Qualification

There were small but significant differences in access to green and natural spaces based on qualification levels. However, the patterns here were more complex. The most consistent finding was that individuals with “other qualifications” such as A levels, GCSEs, or Trade Apprenticeships had somewhat better access to greenspace. For example, those with other qualifications were more likely to live within a 5-minute walk of greenspace (36%) compared to those with no qualifications (30%) or those with a university degree of higher (31%), as shown in Figure 9.

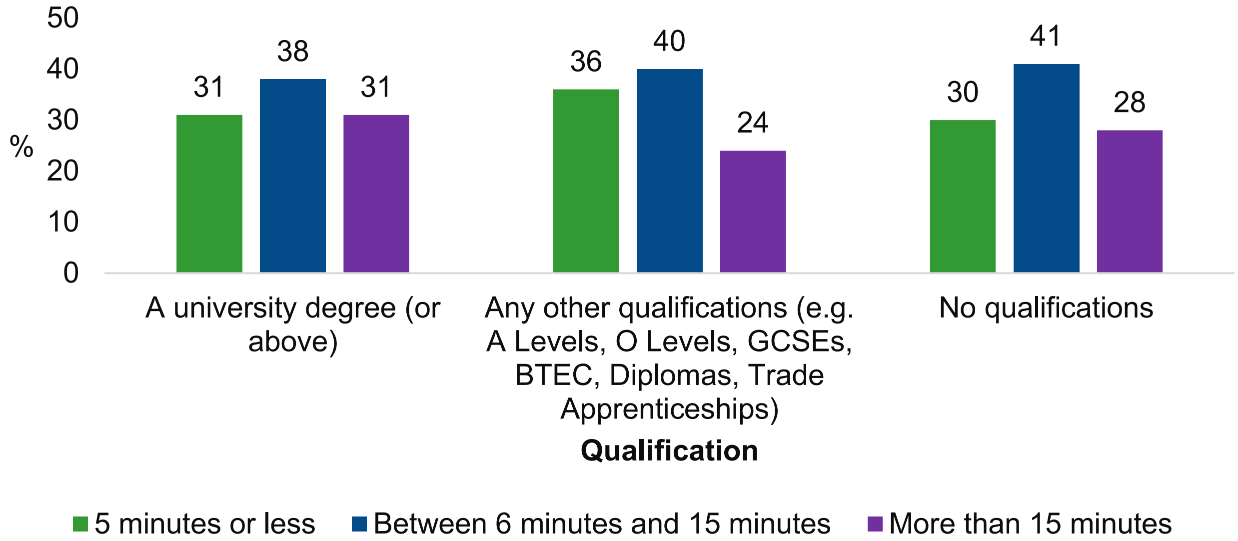


Figure 9: Access to green and natural spaces by qualification

Chart notes

Source: M1_Walk_a. How long does it take you to walk to your nearest local green and natural space?

1. Data collected between April 2023 and March 2024.
2. The samples for this question were A university degree (or above) (7,408), Any other qualifications (15,337), No qualifications (1,221).
3. Base: all adults in England.

Differences in Green and Natural Space Access by Work Status

Access to green and natural spaces varied by work status, with people in full-time employment reporting worse access compared to those in other employment categories. About a third (31%) of individuals in full-time employment reported living within a 5-minute walk of their nearest greenspace, compared to 40% of retired individuals and 41% of self-employed people (Figure 10). The better access reported by retired individuals aligns with the trend observed for older age groups, who generally have closer proximity to greenspaces.

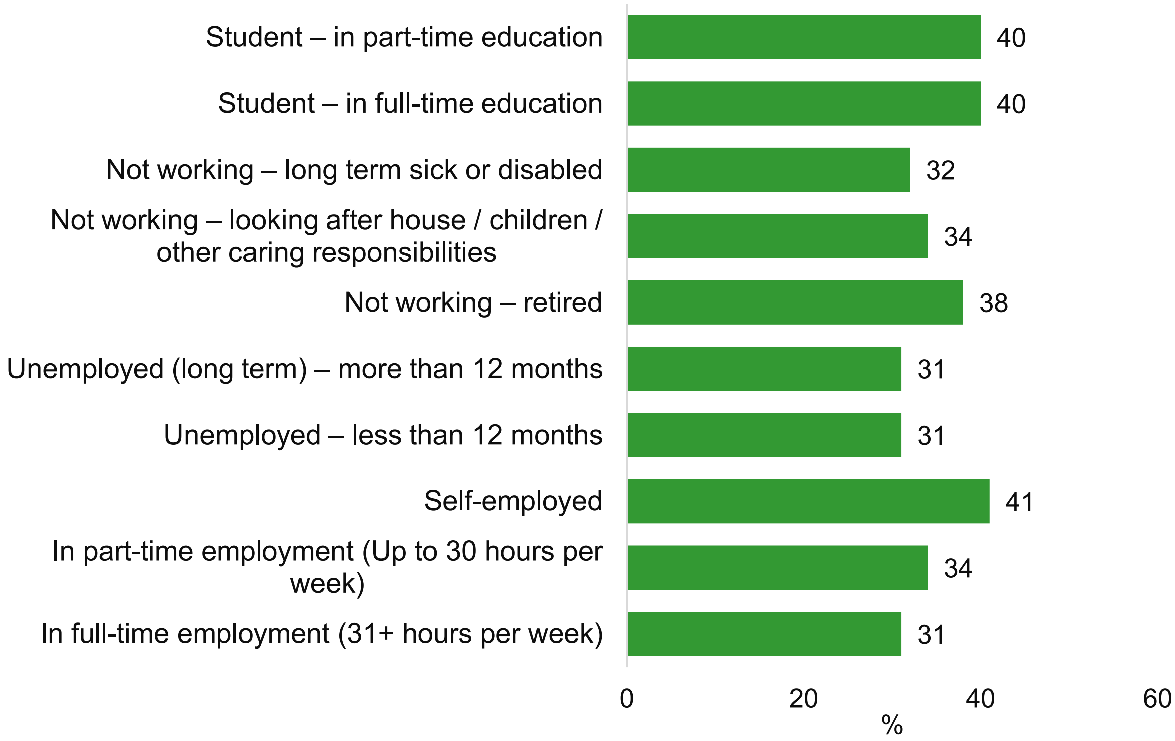


Figure 10: Proportion of population living within 5 minutes' walk from greenspace by work status (%)

Chart notes

Source: M1_Walk_a. How long does it take you to walk to your nearest local green and natural space?

1. Data collected between April 2023 and March 2024.
2. The samples for this question were In full-time employment (9,153), In part-time employment (Up to 30 hours per week) (3,500), Self-employed (1,315), Unemployed – less than 12 months (465), Unemployed (long term) – more than 12 months (672), Not working – retired (5,321), Not working – looking after house / children / other caring responsibilities (1,208), Not working – long term sick or disabled (1,150), Student – in full-time education (1,059), Student – in part-time education (121).
3. For simplicity, this figure does not show all the categories for proximity to greenspaces. A more detailed breakdown can be found in the separate tables Annexe to this report.
4. Base: all adults in England.

Differences in Green and Natural Space Access by Access to a Vehicle

There was a small but significant variation in access to green and natural spaces based on vehicle access. People from households with access to one or more vehicles were more likely to report being within a 5-minute walk of their nearest green or natural space compared with those without vehicle access, as shown in Figure 11.

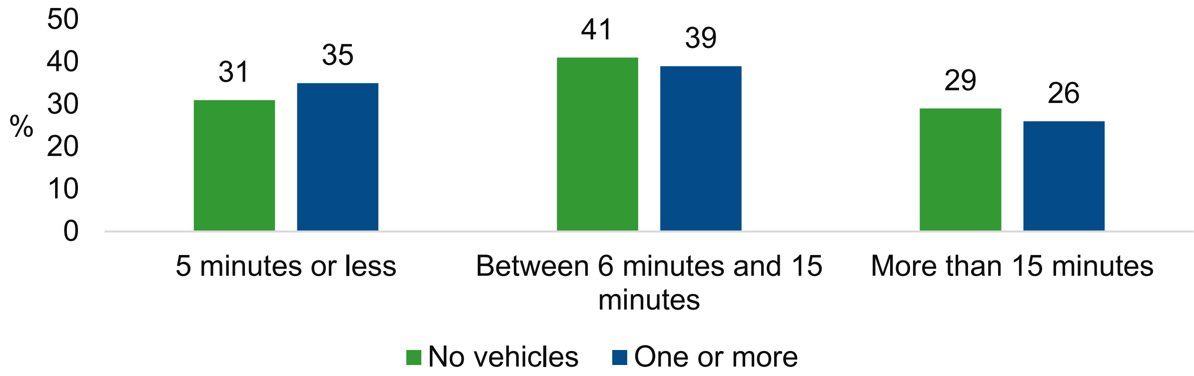


Figure 11: Access to green and natural spaces by number to vehicles in the households

Chart notes

Source: M1_Walk_a. How long does it take you to walk to your nearest local green and natural space?

1. Data collected between April 2023 and March 2024.
2. The samples for this question were No vehicles (4,883), One or more (19,083).
3. Base: all adults in England.

4.

Differences in Green and Natural Space Access by Dog Ownership

There was a small but significant variation in access to green and natural spaces by whether or not there was a dog in the household. People with a dog in their household were more likely to report living more than 15 minutes away from their nearest greenspace compared to those without a dog, as shown in Figure 12. This finding suggests that while dog owners may be frequent users of greenspaces, dog ownership does not necessarily coincide with closer proximity to such spaces.

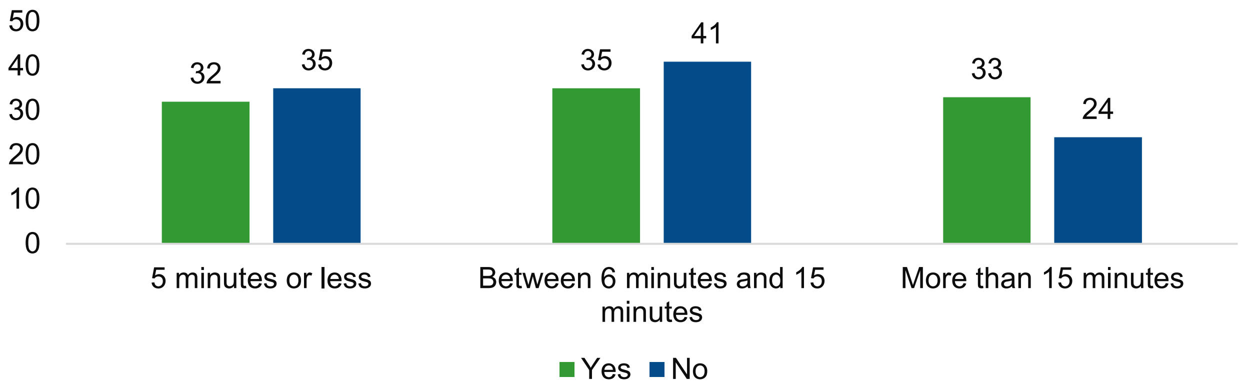


Figure 12: Access to green and natural spaces by whether there is a dog in the household

Chart notes

Source: M1_Walk_a. How long does it take you to walk to your nearest local green and natural space?

1. Data collected between April 2023 and March 2024.
2. The samples for this question were Yes (7,866), No (16,097).
3. Base: all adults in England.

Self-Reported Access to Greenspace Compared to Modelled Greenspace Access

This report has focussed so far on people's self-reported perceptions of how long it takes them to walk to their nearest green or natural space. In the Adults' People and Nature Survey (APaNS), people are asked to consider a range of spaces, including urban parks, canals, countryside, and coastal areas. While these self-reported insights are valuable in reflecting people's lived experiences, they are based on individual judgments, which can vary widely.

An alternative approach to understanding greenspace access relies on objective, modelled estimates. In particular, the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) has produced a series of estimates about access to greenspaces for households in England (See Access to greenspace in England - GOV.UK). Using map data, Defra calculates the shortest walkable route from each household in England to the nearest greenspace. This approach provides a consistent and data-driven perspective on greenspace access. Several potential scenarios were modelled by Defra, allowing different types of area to count as greenspace and setting different distance criteria.

The potential scenarios Defra considered were:

- **All greenspace:** such as playing fields, country parks, and cemeteries, where these are at least 2 hectares in size, and excluding rights of way. To meet this standard the greenspace needs to be within 1km of the household.

- **All greenspace with rights of way:** all greenspaces included in the 'all greenspace' scenario with addition of the rural rights of way greenspaces, where these are at least 2 hectares in size and located within 1 km of the household.

- **The doorstep standard:** accessible greenspaces at least 0.5 hectares in size. This excludes, for example, woodlands or national nature reserves. To meet this standard the greenspace needs to be within 200m of the household.

- **The local standard:** includes similar greenspaces to the doorstep standard, but requires them to be at least 2 hectares in size and within 300m of the household.

This section compares self-reported distance to green and natural spaces with these estimates derived from map data.

All Greenspaces

The "all greenspaces" scenario included all types of greenspace (e.g., playing fields, country parks, cemeteries) of at least 2 hectares in size. A household was classified as meeting this standard if it was located within 1km of such a space. The 1km threshold was chosen as it corresponds roughly to a 15-minute walk for an average person travelling at 4km per hour.

Defra’s findings under this scenario aligned closely with the self-reported data from the Adults’ People and Nature Survey (APaNS). As shown in Figure 10, 73% of people reported living within a 15-minute walk of their nearest green and natural space in APaNS, while Defra’s modelling indicated that 78% of households were within 1km of a qualifying greenspace. This close alignment highlights how well subjective perceptions of access align with objective measurements when viewed at a national level.

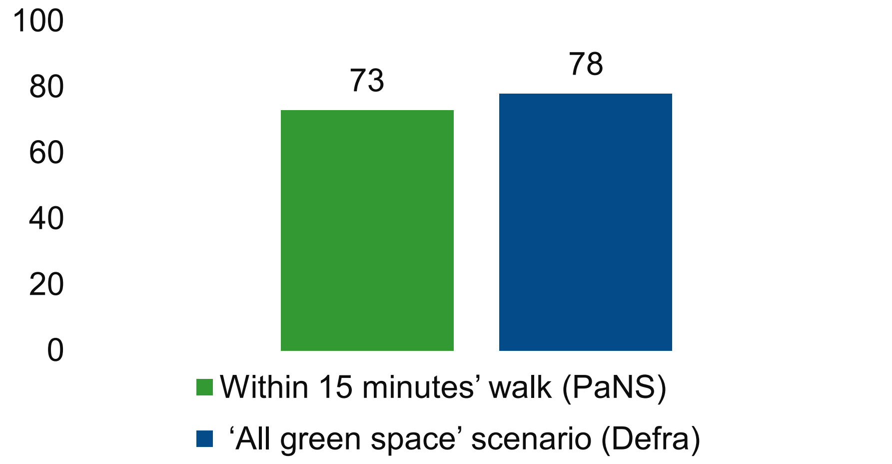


Figure 13: Comparing Defra’s modelled 'all greenspace' scenario to APaNS self-reported 15-minute walk access to a green or natural space

Chart notes

1. APaNS data in the chart shows the percentage of people within 15 minutes’ walk of their nearest green or natural space (M1_Walk_a. How long does it take you to walk to your nearest local green and natural space? Data collected between April 2023 and March 2024. The base for these questions was all adults in England.
2. The Defra modelling displays the proportion of households meeting the ‘All greenspace’ scenario.

The Doorstep and Local Standards

The “doorstep standard” includes greenspaces within 200 metres of the household. The “local standard” includes a very similar set of greenspaces, but increases the size threshold to 2 hectares and includes spaces within 300m of the household. For comparison, Figure 14 presents the proportion of people in APaNS who reported their nearest greenspace was within a 5-minute walk. Here, the APaNS estimate was slightly more than double Defra’s modelled estimates for the Doorstep and Local standards. These findings suggest a significant difference between self-reported access and modelled estimates when limiting the comparison to closer spaces.

One possible reason for this discrepancy is the difference in how distance is measured. A 5-minute walk is typically estimated to cover around 400 metres, which is a larger range than the 200m and 300m thresholds used in the doorstep and local standards. This means that even if Defra's modelled estimates accurately reflect access within their respective cutoffs, they may exclude greenspaces that people still perceive as being within a short and easily walkable distance.

Additionally, differences in methodology may contribute to these variations. APaNS relies on individuals' perceptions and includes any green or natural space they consider relevant, while Defra's modelling uses stricter size criteria and reports at the household level. Despite these differences, the APaNS data reveals that nearly a third of the population perceives themselves as having very nearby access to greenspace, emphasizing the importance of considering lived experiences alongside modelled estimates.

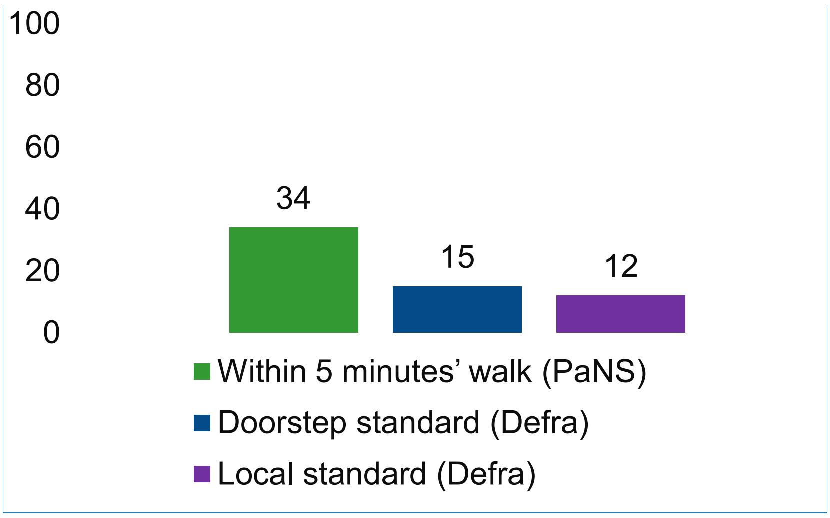


Figure 14: Comparing Defra's doorstep and local standard scenarios and self-reported 5-minute walk access to a green or natural space

Chart notes

1. APaNS data in the chart shows the percentage of people within 5 minutes' walk of their nearest green or natural space (M1_Walk_a. How long does it take you to walk to your nearest local green and natural space? Data collected between April 2023 and March 2024. The base for this question was all adults in England).
2. The Defra modelling displays the proportion of households meeting the 'Doorstep standard' and 'Local standard' scenarios.

Comparing Urban and Rural Populations

The findings for urban and rural populations reveal notable differences depending on the method used. According to some scenarios in Defra's modelling, rural households have lower access to greenspaces compared to urban households. For instance, in the "all greenspaces" scenario, 85% of urban households were estimated to have an eligible greenspace within 1km, compared to just 50% of rural households. However, in the "all greenspace with rights of way" scenario, which includes all accessible greenspaces of 2 hectares or more and rural rights of way within 1 km of a household, rural households have slightly better access than urban households: 93% of rural households were estimated to have an eligible greenspace compared with 91% under this scenario. The definition of greenspace adopted in this analysis can substantially shift the picture we observe in terms of both greenspace access overall and which groups have the best access to greenspaces locally.

Turning to the Adults' People and Nature Survey (APaNS), findings from this survey suggest that rural residents perceive themselves as having better access to greenspaces. Half of rural respondents reported having a greenspace within a 5-minute walk, compared to less than a third of urban respondents (Figure 15).

This discrepancy with some of the estimates found in the Defra modelling may be due to differences in how greenspace is defined. As described in Defra's report, limitations in the digitisation of rights-of-way data means that Defra's modelling may not include all private land with public rights of way, which are key features of rural landscapes and often provide significant greenspace access for rural residents. Conversely, APaNS respondents may have included these areas in their self-reported perceptions, capturing a broader understanding of greenspace access in rural settings. It may also be that private land which is excluded from Defra modelling is being included by people in their assessment of how near they are to a greenspace, if they are able to access and make use of these.

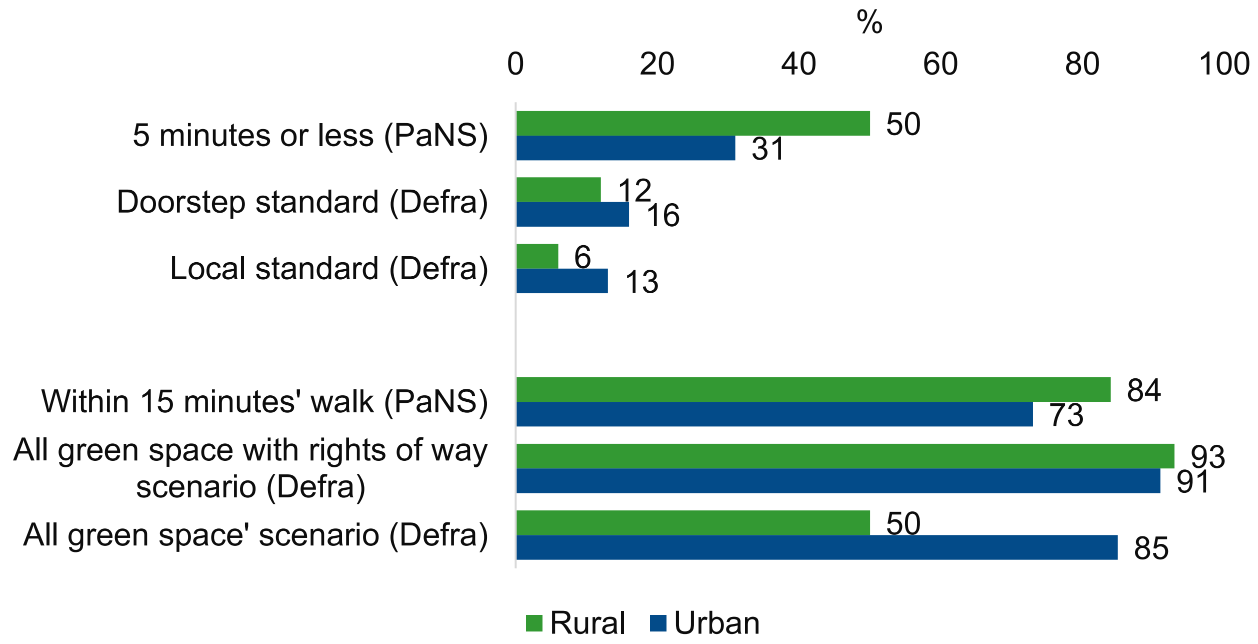


Figure 15: Comparing Defra's scenarios and self-reported walk access to a green or natural space for rural and urban areas

1. APaNS data in the chart shows the percentage of people within 5- and 15-minutes' walk of their nearest green or natural space (M1_Walk_a. How long does it take you to walk to your nearest local green and natural space? Data collected between April 2023 and March 2024. The base for this question was all adults in England).
2. The Defra modelling displays the proportion of households meeting the 'Doorstep', 'Local', 'All green space', and 'All green space with rights of way' scenarios.

Barriers to Using Green and Natural Spaces

Barriers to Spending More Time in Green and Natural Spaces By Access to Green and Natural Spaces

Understanding the barriers that prevent people from spending more time in green and natural spaces can help policymakers identify opportunities to promote greater use of these spaces.

When asked, “What, if anything, generally stops you from spending more free time outside in green and natural spaces?” the most common response was bad weather, mentioned by 43% of respondents. Other frequently cited reasons included being too busy with responsibilities at home (27%) and work (26%), while less common reasons accounted for a smaller share (Figure 16).

Importantly, the barriers people reported varied depending on how close they lived to their nearest greenspace. Those who perceived worse access to greenspaces were more likely to report barriers such as:

- A lack of local greenspaces available,
- Insufficient facilities or access points for people with disabilities,
- Financial costs,
- Concerns about crime, anti-social behaviour, or getting hurt or injured.

In contrast, people with better access to greenspaces were more likely to cite personal barriers and environmental factors such as bad weather or being too busy at home.

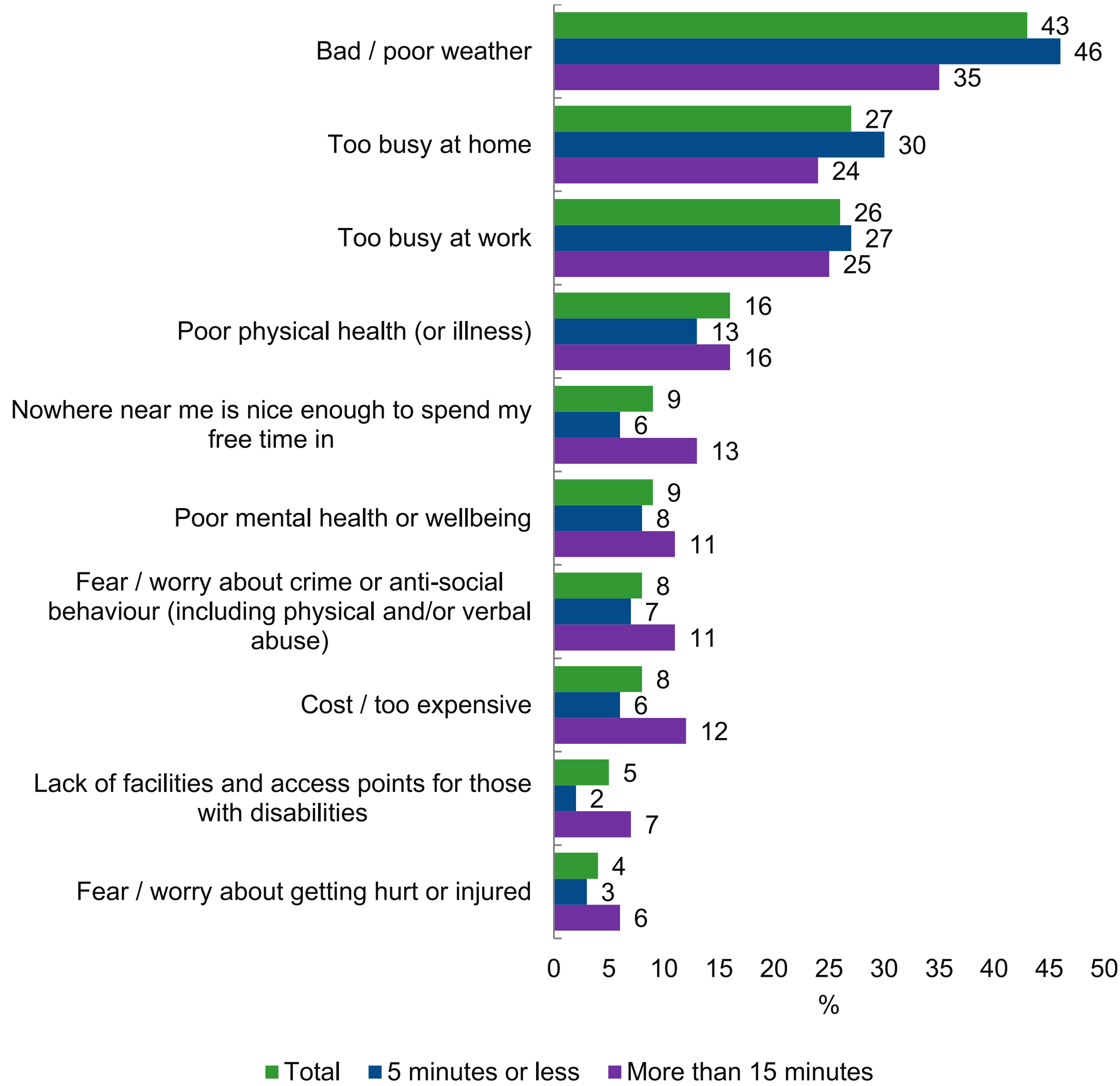


Figure 16: Proportion of population reporting various barriers for spending more free time in greenspaces (%)

Chart notes

Source: M3_Q9. What, if anything, generally stops you from spending more free time outside in green and natural spaces?

1. Data collected between April 2023 and March 2024.
2. The samples for this question were Total (12,386), 5 minutes or less (3,876), More than 15 minutes (3,182). This question/ was asked of 30% of respondents so sample sizes are smaller than elsewhere.
3. Base: all adults in England.
4. Figures do not add up to 100% as people could select multiple answer options.
5. The following response options were not presented in the figure: ‘prefer other leisure activities’, ‘no particular reason’, ‘not interested’, ‘another reason’ and ‘stayed at home to stop coronavirus spreading’.

Concerns and Worries About Visiting Greenspaces Among Infrequent Users

While the previous section examined barriers experienced by all people in England, it is particularly important to understand the challenges faced by those who are not frequent users of greenspaces. These individuals may encounter specific obstacles that prevent them from engaging with greenspaces more regularly. By identifying these unique challenges, targeted interventions can be developed to encourage greater greenspace use among this group.

People who reported no visits to green or natural spaces in the last 14 days were asked whether they were "concerned or worried by" various potential barriers to using greenspaces. Among this group, the most common concerns were a lack of facilities and safety issues, such as anti-social behaviour or the risks of visiting after dark. These worries were reported by about one in four people (24–25%), as shown in Figure 17. However, it is important to note that around one-third (33%) of this group reported no concerns or worries at all.

Concerns about visiting greenspaces were closely tied to how far people lived from their nearest greenspaces. People living in closer proximity to greenspace were less likely to report worries: Over a third (37%) of people living within a 5-minute walk reported *no concerns or barriers*, compared to only 26% of those living more than 15 minutes away.

For those who lived further away, distance-related concerns were more pronounced. Those who lived more than 15 minutes from greenspace were more likely to report issues like getting lost, navigating traffic, and a lack of essential facilities such as accessible pathways, toilets, and benches. By contrast, people living closer were less likely to report these practical concerns.

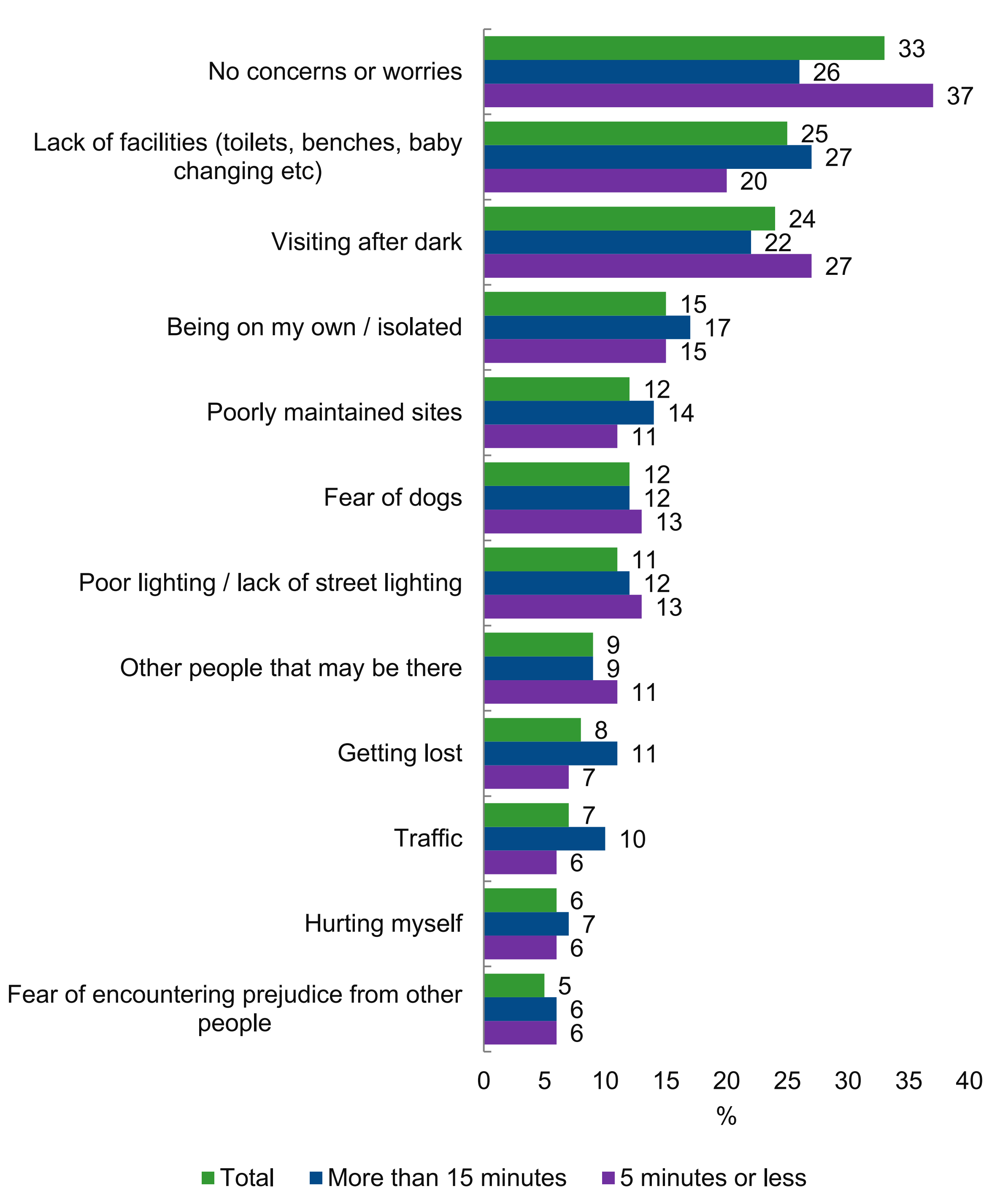


Figure 17: Proportion of population reporting various concerns about visiting greenspaces (%)

Chart notes

Source: M2B_Q4A. Thinking about visiting green and natural spaces, are you concerned or worried by any of the following?

1. Data collected between April 2023 and March 2024.
2. The samples for this question were Total (5,664), 5 minutes or less (1,323), More than 15 minutes (1,711).
3. Base: all adults in England who did not visit a green or natural spaces in the 14 days before being surveyed.
4. Figures do not add up to 100% as people could select multiple answer options.

5. The following response options were not presented in the figure: ‘Fear of crime’, ‘Anti-social behaviour’ and ‘Other’ were excluded because the percentage selecting these were the same across the different groups, and ‘Contracting or spreading coronavirus’ because it is now less relevant to people’s green space use choices.

Seasonal Variation in Greenspace Access and Use

Stability in Perceived Ease-of-Access, Walking Distance, and Preference for Nearest Greenspace

Access to and use of greenspaces remain remarkably consistent across seasons, emphasising their value as a year-round resource for communities. The proportion of people reporting that their nearest greenspace is within a 15-minute walk varies by less than 1% over the year. Similarly, perceptions of ease of walking to nearby greenspaces show only minor month-to-month variation of less than 2%, reflecting stable perceived access regardless of the time of year. The previously documented preference for one’s nearest greenspace also remained steady across seasons, varying less than 2% by season (77%-79%).

Seasonal Variation in Greenspace Use

To understand how frequency of greenspace visits changes throughout the year, patterns were analysed across both seasons and individual months. This dual approach provided a more detailed perspective than broad seasonal comparisons alone, such as summer versus winter, by uncovering month-by-month variations. Examining usage at this granular level offers a clearer understanding of how people engage with greenspaces over time and how these patterns fluctuate throughout the year.

In addition to this analysis, an exploratory, data-driven time series analysis was conducted using time series decomposition techniques to examine greenspace use in greater depth. The findings from this approach broadly supported and aligned with the seasonal and monthly patterns observed in the main analysis. Visits to greenspaces remain consistently high throughout the year, with modest seasonal fluctuations.

As shown in Figure 18, visit rates peak in summer (76%), while the lowest rates are observed in winter (69%). Importantly, even during winter, a majority of the population reported visiting greenspaces. The proportion of people who did not visit a greenspace was highest in winter (31%) but remained relatively low across all seasons. This demonstrates that greenspaces continue to be frequently visited, despite seasonal changes. More technical details of this analysis can be found in Appendix B.

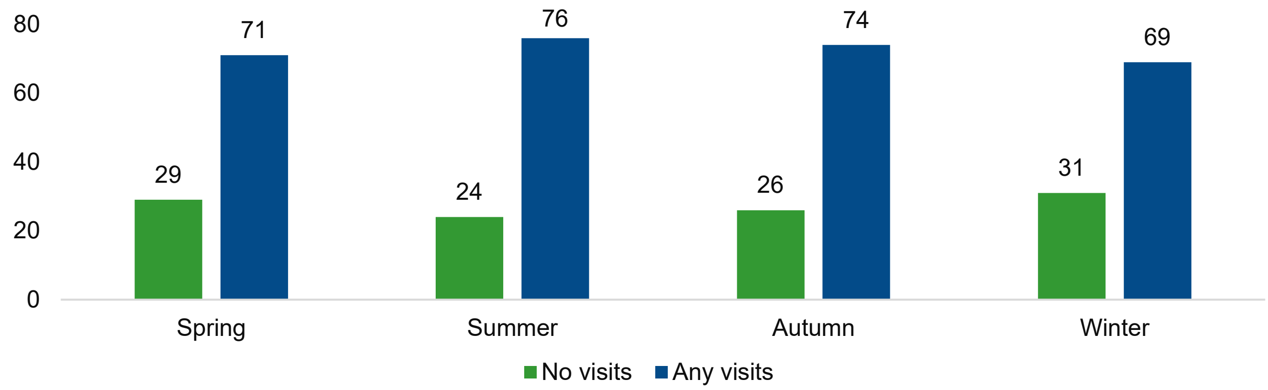


Figure 18: Proportion of population who visited green and natural spaces by season (%)

Chart notes

Source: No_Of_Visit/s: How many times, if at all, did you make this type of visit to green and natural spaces in the last 14 days?

1. Data collected between April 2020 and March 2024.
2. The samples for this question were Spring (20,364), Summer (19,818), Autumn (19,790), Winter (19,642). This question was asked of 90% of respondents so sample sizes are smaller than elsewhere.
3. Base: all adults in England.

The month-by-month analysis of greenspace visit patterns provides additional insight into seasonal trends. Visits are highest in August (77%), likely due to favourable weather, longer daylight hours, and the summer school holidays, which encourage outdoor activity. In contrast, visits are lowest in December (68%), likely reflecting the impact of colder temperatures, shorter days, and the busy holiday season.

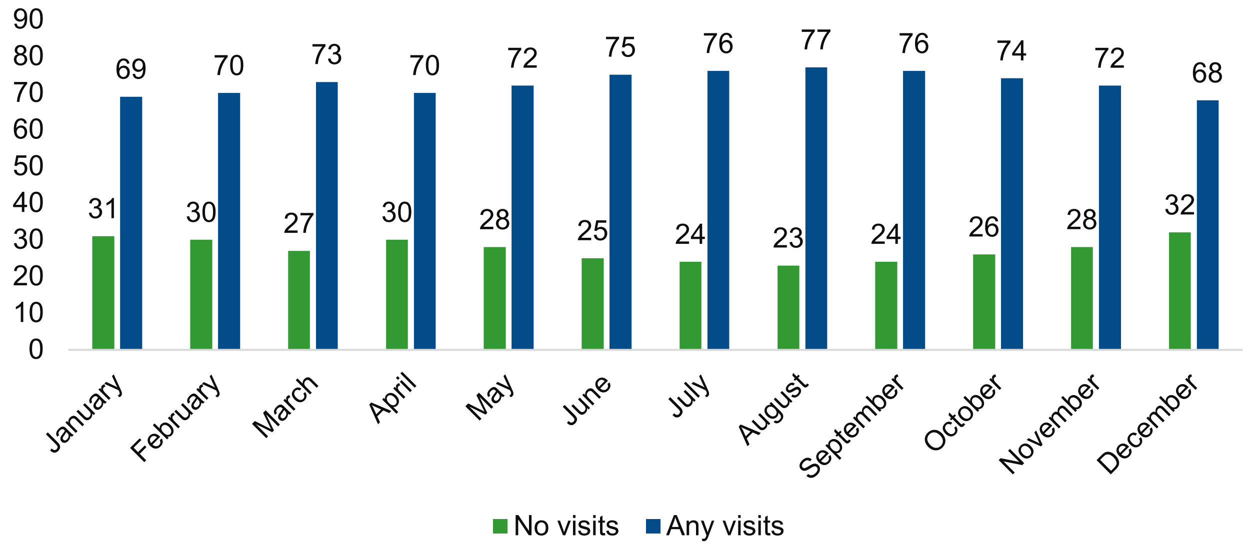


Figure 19: Proportion of population who visited green and natural spaces by month (%)

Chart notes

Source: No_Of_Visits: How many times, if at all, did you make this type of visit to green and natural spaces in the last 14 days?

1. Data collected between April 2020 and March 2024.
2. The samples for this question were January (6,685), February (6,437), March (6,922), April (6,743), May (6,699), June (6,707), July (6,540), August (6,571), September (6,635), October (6,492), November (6,663), December (6,520). This question was asked of 90% of respondents so sample sizes are smaller than elsewhere.
3. Base: all adults in England.

Chapter Summary

This chapter examined how accessible green and natural spaces are to people living in England, how access varies across different groups, and the factors that influence greenspace use.

The findings suggest that while most people in England (73%) live within a 15-minute walk of their nearest greenspace, access is not universal, with 27% living beyond this threshold. Importantly, proximity plays a central role in greenspace use—most people (78-79%) visit their nearest greenspace most often, regardless of how far away it is. This highlights the importance of high-quality greenspaces close to where people live, as people tend to use what is most accessible to them.

However, access is not equally distributed across the population. White residents were more likely to report good access compared to individuals from other ethnic backgrounds, and access was lower among younger adults (16-39 years old), those living in more deprived areas, and people with limiting health conditions. These disparities suggest that some groups may face structural or environmental barriers that make it harder to reach greenspaces.

The relationship between greenspace access and barriers to use further reinforces the importance of proximity. Those living within a 5-minute walk were much more likely to report no concerns or barriers (37%), compared to just 26% of those living more than 15 minutes away. Distance-related concerns—such as traffic, getting lost, lack of facilities, safety worries, and financial costs—were more frequently reported by those further from greenspaces. In contrast, people with better access were more likely to cite personal and weather-related reasons for not visiting, such as being too busy at home or work.

Despite these variations in access and barriers, greenspaces remain a stable and valued resource throughout the year. The proportion of people reporting access to greenspaces within a 15-minute walk did not change significantly across seasons, and while greenspace use was highest in summer (79%) and lowest in winter (70%), these seasonal shifts were relatively modest. This suggests that greenspaces are an important year-round amenity for communities, rather than being used only in warmer months.

Taken together, these findings highlight both the widespread value of greenspaces and the importance of proximity in determining access and use. They also point to disparities that may limit access for certain groups, raising important considerations for how greenspaces are designed, maintained, and promoted to ensure they are accessible and inviting to all communities.

Chapter 2: How People Perceive the Quality of Green and Natural Spaces

This chapter examines how people in England perceive the quality of their local green and natural spaces and how these perceptions relate to how often they use these spaces.

The chapter is organised into four main sections. First, it discusses how people can be classified into distinct groups based on their shared perceptions of greenspace quality. These groups are identified using a segmentation analysis, which identifies similar groups of people based on a series of questions about their local green and natural spaces. Next, the chapter examines which groups are more likely to report positive or negative perceptions of greenspace quality. This includes looking at differences based on characteristics such as age, ethnicity, income, and location, helping to build a clearer picture of who experiences high- or low-quality greenspaces. The third section investigates the relationship between perceived quality and greenspace use, while also considering how the importance of perceived quality changes when proximity is also taken into account. Finally, the chapter explores other factors that shape greenspace use, beyond quality and travel time, to build a more comprehensive understanding of what drives engagement with green and natural spaces.

Research Objectives

The research objectives of chapter two are:

1. To group people in England into distinct segments based on shared perceptions of the quality of greenspaces in their local area.
2. To describe socio-demographic and individual characteristics of people in each segment.
3. To assess the relative import of the perceived quality and proximity of greenspaces on how often they are used by people in England.
4. To identify additional factors that influence greenspace use, beyond proximity and perceived quality.

A segmentation of Adults in England by Perceived Quality of Local Green and Natural Spaces

Analytical Approach

To understand more about quality and use of greenspaces among people in England, Latent Class Analysis (LCA) was used to identify distinct groups of people who share similar patterns in their perceptions of local greenspace quality. LCA is a statistical method that allows to identify groups of people that are as similar as possible within each group and as different as possible between different groups based on their survey responses.

The analysis used responses to a set of survey questions about green and natural spaces in the people's local area. Specifically, participants were asked to think about green and natural spaces close to where they live and indicate their level of agreement or disagreement with the following statements about their local green and natural spaces:

- Good places for mental health and wellbeing
- A high enough standard to want to spend time in
- Good places for children to play
- Places that encourage physical health and exercise
- Good places to meet other people
- Provide good opportunities to see nature

Segments

The LCA identified four distinct segments of the population, each representing a different pattern of perceptions of local greenspace quality. Generally, these segments fell on a continuum from high to low perceived quality of greenspaces. The distribution of the segments is presented in Figure 20, with each segment given a descriptive label that reflects its overall perception of local greenspace quality.

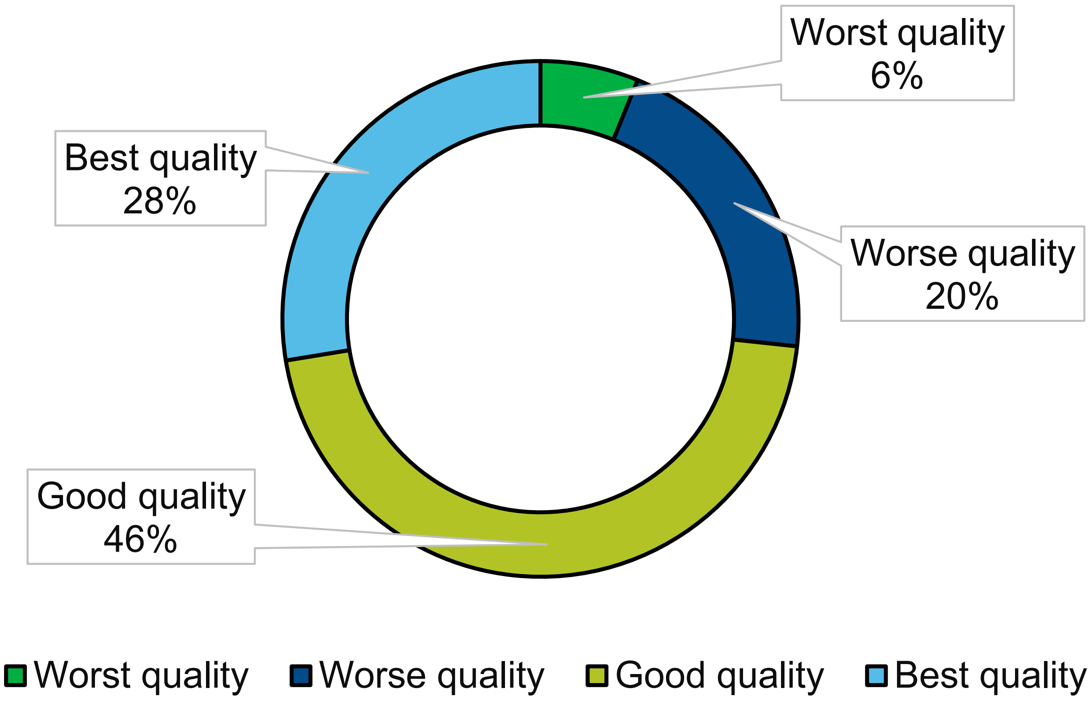


Figure 20 : Segments of the population (%)

Chart notes

1. The sample for the segmentation variable was 92,017.
2. Data collected between April 2020 and March 2024.
3. Base: all adults in England.

These results could indicate that different aspects of green and natural space quality—such as suitability for socialising, play, relaxation, or enjoying nature—tend to align, with spaces perceived as high quality in one dimension often excelling across multiple dimensions. This would suggest that a holistic approach to improving greenspaces, addressing various attributes simultaneously, may have the greatest positive impact on both perceptions and overall use of these spaces.

However, this pattern could also be partly explained by a survey response tendency known as the halo effect, where people who feel positive about their local greenspaces tend to rate all aspects highly, even if their experiences vary. This suggests that while perceptions of greenspace quality are meaningfully structured, they may also reflect broader attitudes rather than completely distinct evaluations of each aspect. Nevertheless, the results indicate that perceptions of greenspace quality largely follow a continuum from high to low across the population.

Below, all four segments are described in detail, highlighting the key features and attitudes that define each group.

Segments With Better Perceived Quality:

"Best Quality" Segment (28% of the population):

This group had the most positive perceptions of their local greenspaces across all aspects. The vast majority (80–81%) strongly agreed that their greenspaces are of a high enough standard to spend time in, promote physical health and exercise, provide good opportunities to see nature, and support mental health and wellbeing. Additionally, a substantial proportion (67–69%) strongly agreed that these spaces are good for socialising and for children to play.

"Good Quality" Segment (46% of the population):

The largest segment, this group was generally positive about their local greenspaces but less enthusiastic than the "Best Quality" segment. Most individuals (over 70%) agreed—though not strongly agreed— with the positive statements about their local greenspace quality. This group also had a higher proportion of people selecting "neither agree nor disagree" compared to the "Best Quality" segment.

Segments With Worse Perceived Quality:

"Worse Quality" Segment (20% of the population):

This group showed ambivalence toward their local greenspaces. Around half (48–52%) neither agreed nor disagreed with statements about their spaces being good for mental health and wellbeing, encouraging physical activity, being of a high enough standard to spend time in, or providing opportunities to meet others. They were also more likely to disagree, though not strongly, with the positive statements.

"Worst Quality" Segment (6% of the population):

The smallest group by far, this segment had the most negative perceptions of their local greenspaces. The majority (79–89%) strongly disagreed with all the positive statements, indicating significant dissatisfaction with the overall quality of greenspaces in their area.

Segment Composition: Characteristics of People With Good or Bad Perceptions of Greenspace Quality

This section examines the characteristics of individuals within each segment to understand who is more likely to perceive their local greenspaces as high or low quality. It considers socio-demographic factors as well as individual attitudes, such as whether people agree that spending time in nature is very important to them and their reported access to green and natural spaces.

Ethnicity

White residents are more likely to perceive their local greenspaces as being of high quality. In contrast, individuals from other ethnic groups are generally less likely to agree that their local spaces are high-quality, although there is limited variation between groups by ethnicity.

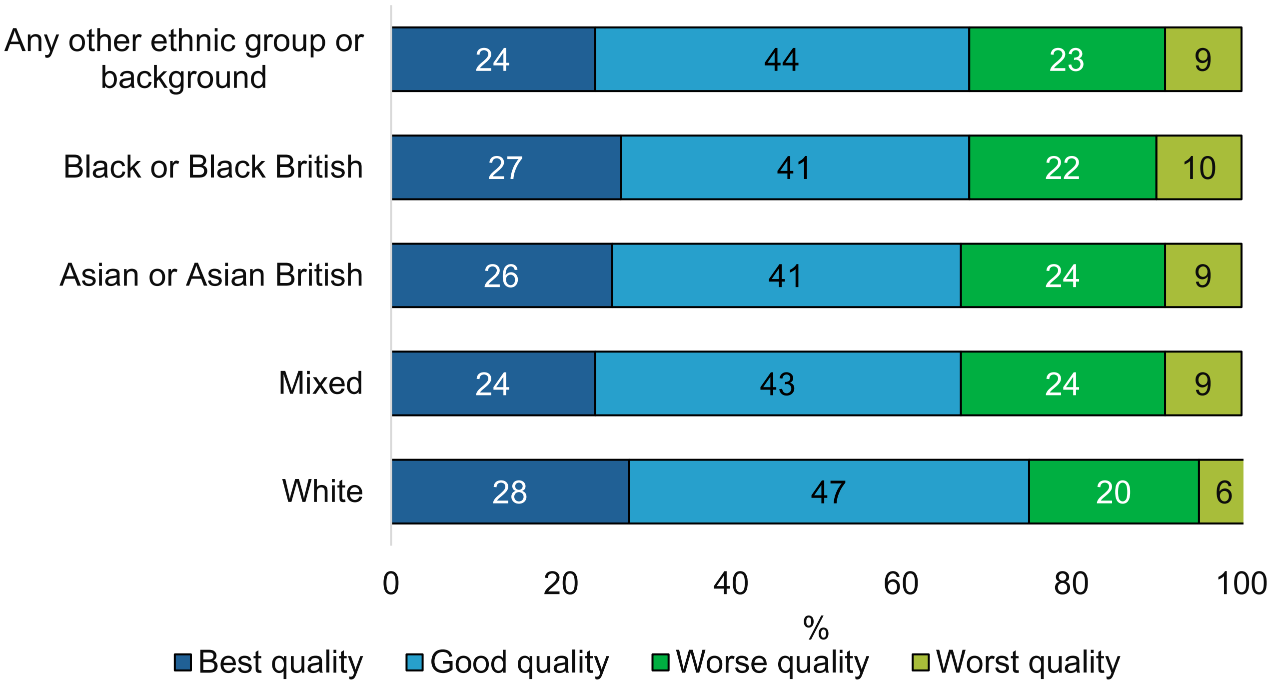


Figure 21: Perceived greenspace quality, by ethnicity (%)

Chart notes

1. Data collected between April 2020 and March 2024.
2. The samples for this variable were Any other ethnic group or background (745), Asian or Asian British (5,892), Black or Black British (3,139), Mixed (1,994), White (78,292).
3. Base: all adults in England.
4. Due to rounding, some percentages add up to 99% or 101%.

Area Deprivation (IMD decile)

People living in more deprived areas were more likely fall into the “Worse quality” segment, indicating poorer perceptions of local greenspaces. Conversely, those in less deprived areas are more likely to report having better quality greenspaces.

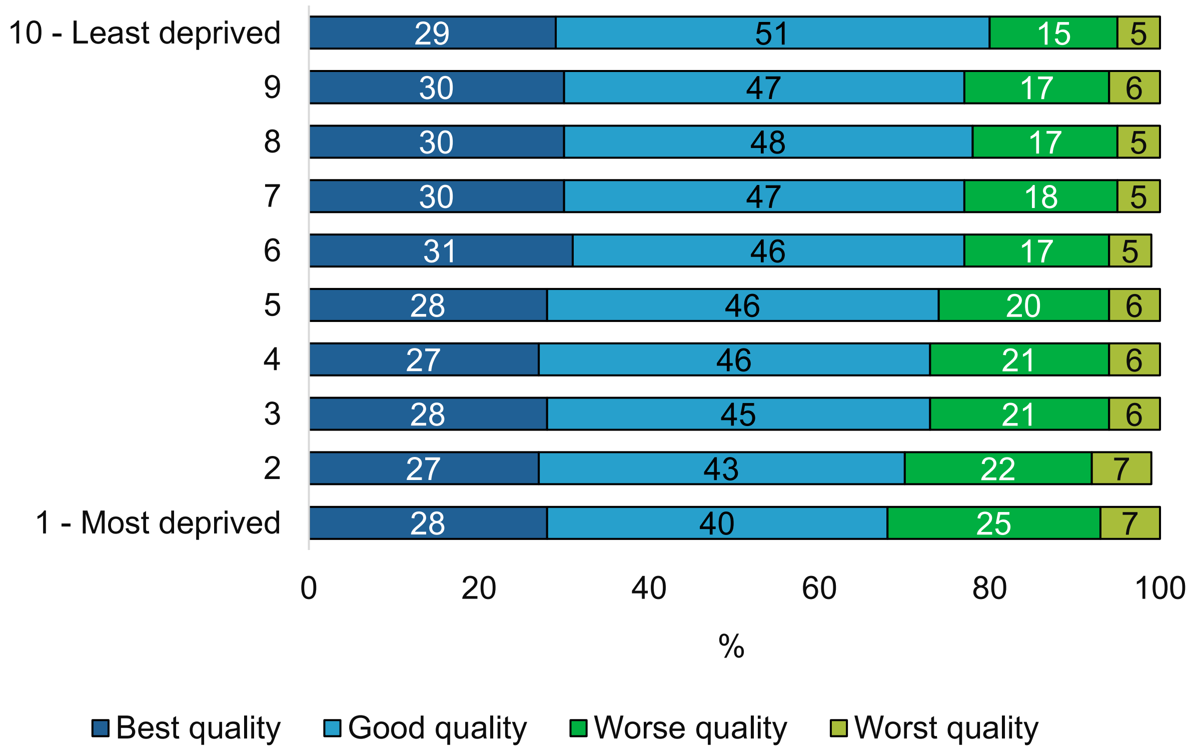


Figure 22: Perceived greenspace quality, by area deprivation (IMD decile) (%)

Chart notes

1. Data collected between April 2020 and March 2024.
2. The samples for this variable were 1 - Most deprived (7,600), 2 (7,437), 3 (7,770), 4 (7,944), 5 (7,462), 6 (7,534), 7 (7,561), 8 (7,353), 9 (7,397), 10 - Least deprived (6,847).
3. Base: all adults in England.
4. Due to rounding, some percentages add up to 99% or 101%.

Income

Household income was related to the perceived greenspace quality. People with a household income below £19,999 were more likely to perceive the quality of local greenspaces negatively compared with those with higher income. In contrast, those with a household income above £40,000 were more likely to fall into the "Best quality" segment.

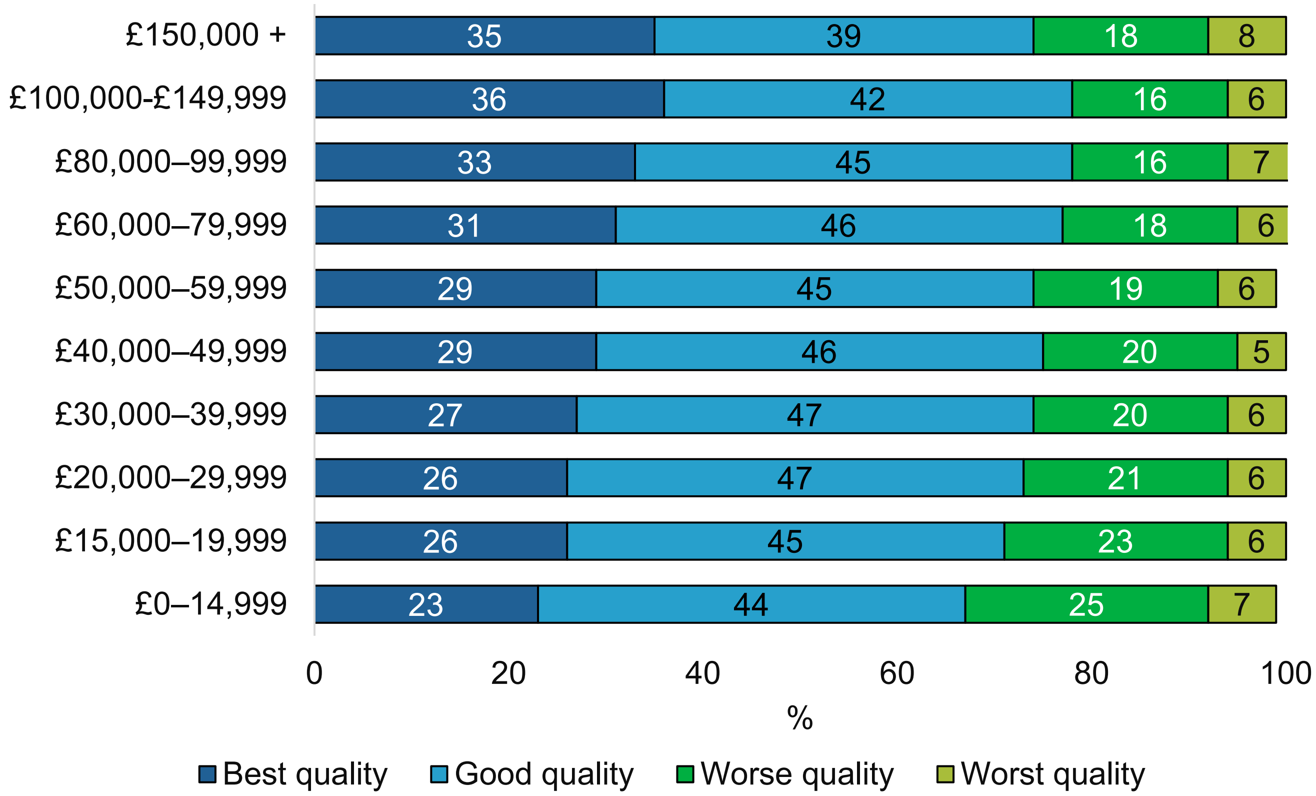


Figure 23: Perceived greenspace quality by household income (%)

Chart notes

1. Data collected between April 2020 and March 2024.
2. The samples for this variable were £150,000 + (1,215), £100,000-£149,999 (2,855), £80,000–99,999 (3,921), £60,000–79,999 (7,033), £50,000–59,999 (7,134), £40,000–49,999 (10,764), £30,000–39,999 (14,802), £20,000–29,999 (18,614), £15,000–19,999 (10,666), £0–14,999 (14,577).
3. Base: all adults in England.
4. Due to rounding, some percentages add up to 99% or 101%.

Rural or Urban Status

Somewhat counterintuitively, there was not a strong relationship between living in a rural area and having a more positive assessment of greenspace quality in the local area. People in rural areas were *slightly* more likely to live in an area of high-quality greenspace.

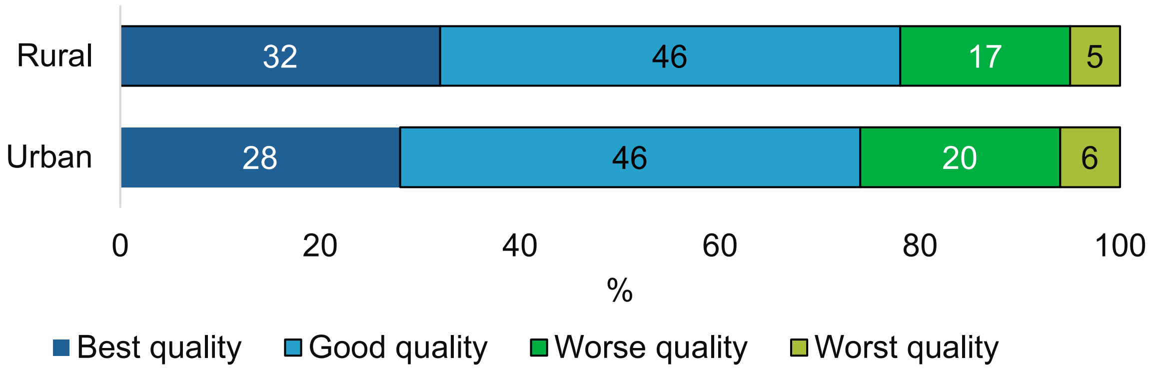


Figure 24: Perceived greenspace quality, by respondent's urban or rural status (%)

Chart notes

1. Data collected between April 2020 and March 2024.
2. The samples for this variable were Rural (11,815), Urban (63,090).
3. Base: all adults in England.

Disability

People with longstanding health conditions that affect their daily activities a lot were more likely to fall into the "Worst quality" segment compared to other groups (10%). Conversely, those with no health conditions or whose conditions do not impact their daily activities are more likely to belong to the "Best quality" and "Good quality" segments, highlighting a potential link between health status and perceptions of greenspace quality.

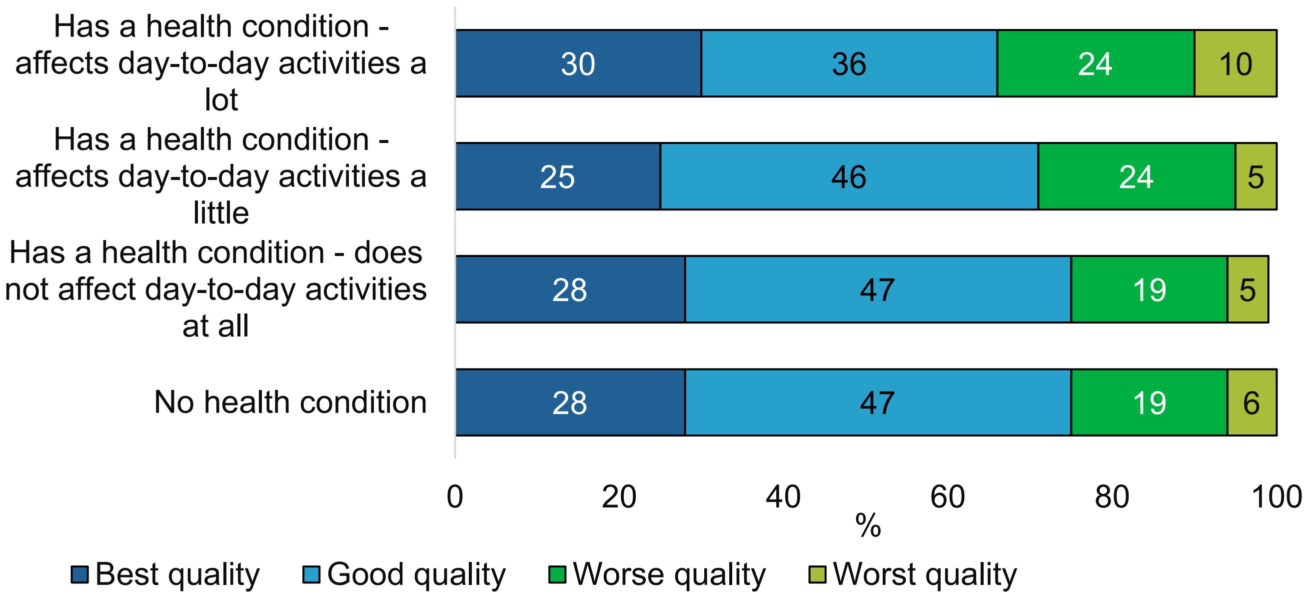


Figure 25: Perceived greenspace quality, by respondent's disability status (%)

Chart notes

1. Data collected between April 2020 and March 2024.
2. The samples for this variable were Has a health condition - affects day-to-day activities a lot (7,430), Has a health condition - affects day-to-day activities a little (13,283), Has a

health condition - does not affect day-to-day activities at all (4,077), No health condition (57,159).
3. Base: all adults in England.
4. Due to rounding, some percentages add up to 99% or 101%.

Age

Younger age groups were more likely to have worse perceptions of their local greenspaces compared to older groups, with almost a third falling into "Worse quality" segment among people aged 16-24. Older age groups were more positive in their assessments, with 51% of those aged 65+ falling into "Good quality" segment.

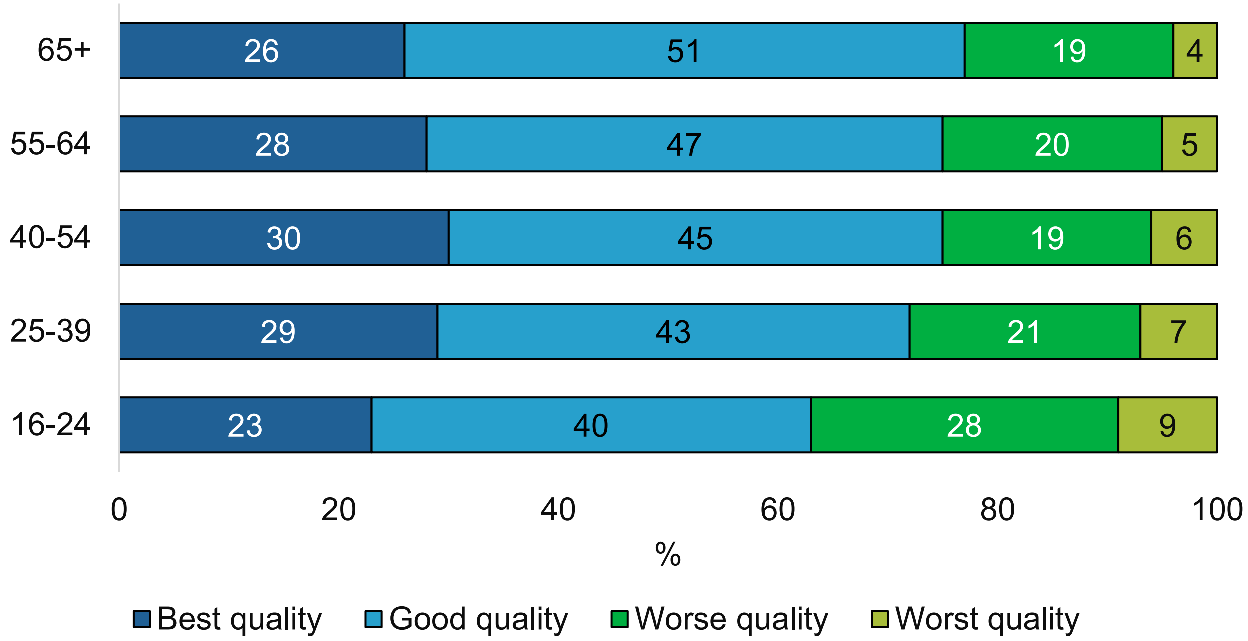


Figure 26: Perceived greenspace quality, by respondent's age (%)

Chart notes

1. Data collected between April 2020 and March 2024.
2. The samples for this variable were 65+ (21,804), 55-64 (14,427), 40-54 (22,925), 25-39 (21,796), 16-24 (11,065).
3. Base: all adults in England.
4. Due to rounding, some percentages add up to 99% or 101%.

Work Status

There were differences in perceptions of greenspace quality based on employment status. People in full-time employment, part-time employment, or self-employment are more likely to belong to the "Best quality" and "Good quality" segments compared to other groups. Those who are unemployed, long-term sick or disabled, or students (particularly in part-time education) are more likely to fall into the "Worse quality" and "Worst quality" segments. Retired individuals are predominantly represented in the "Good quality" segment (51%).

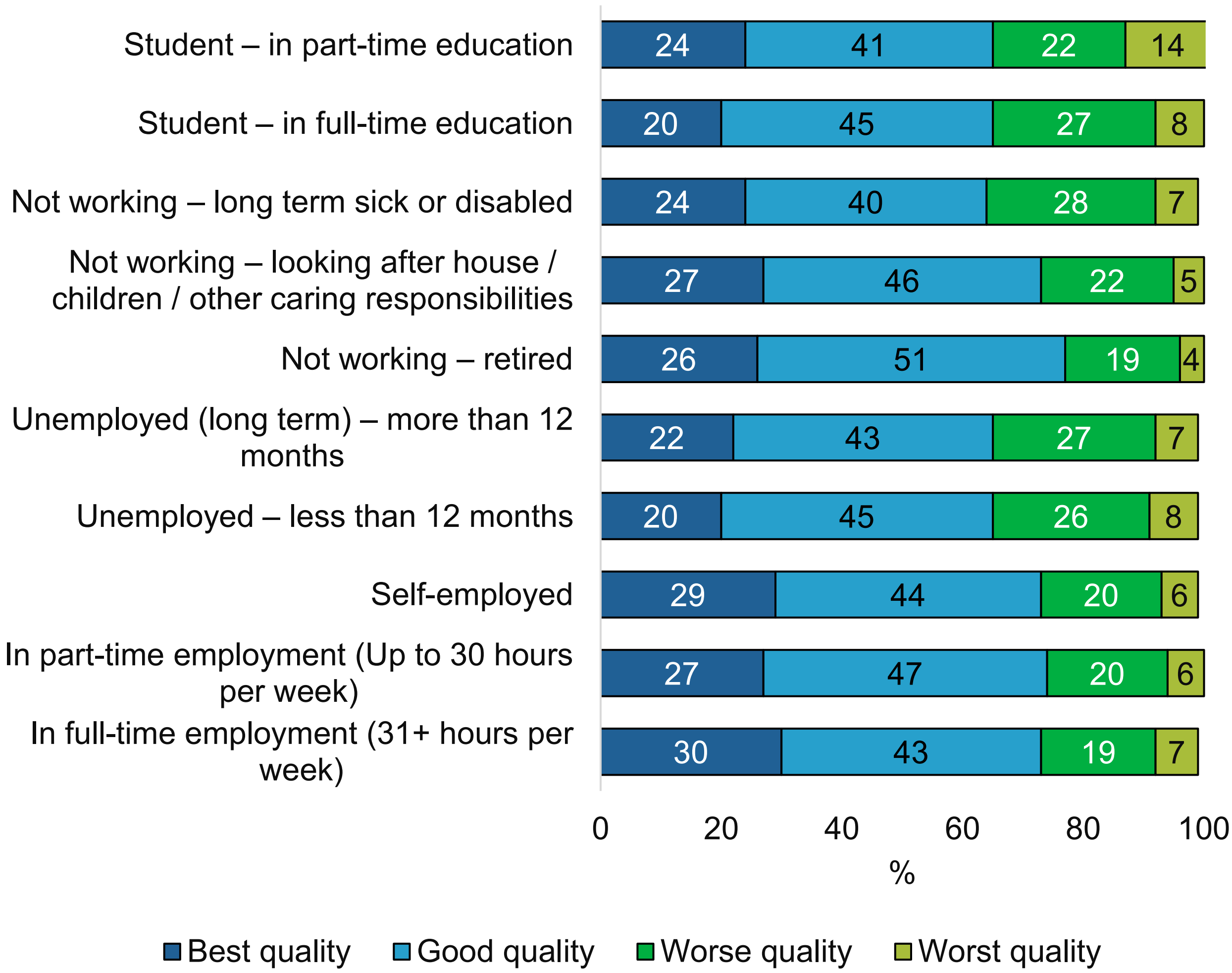


Figure 27: Perceived greenspace quality, by respondent's work status (%)

Chart notes

1. Data collected between April 2020 and March 2024.
2. The samples for this variable were Student – in part-time education (397), Student – in full-time education (4,057), Not working – long term sick or disabled (4,274), Not working – looking after house / children / other caring responsibilities (5,077), Not working – retired (22,277), Unemployed (long term) – more than 12 months (2,498), Unemployed – less than

12 months (1,764), Self-employed (4,843), In part-time employment (Up to 30 hours per week) (12,477), In full-time employment (31+ hours per week) (34,345).

3. Base: all adults in England.
4. Due to rounding, some percentages add up to 99% or 101%.

Access to a vehicle in the household

People from households with one or more cars had slightly better perceptions of greenspace quality, with 28% in the "Best quality" segment compared to 25% among people without a vehicle in their households. However, most in both groups fall into the "Good quality" segment, and there is a modest difference in those reporting "Worse quality."

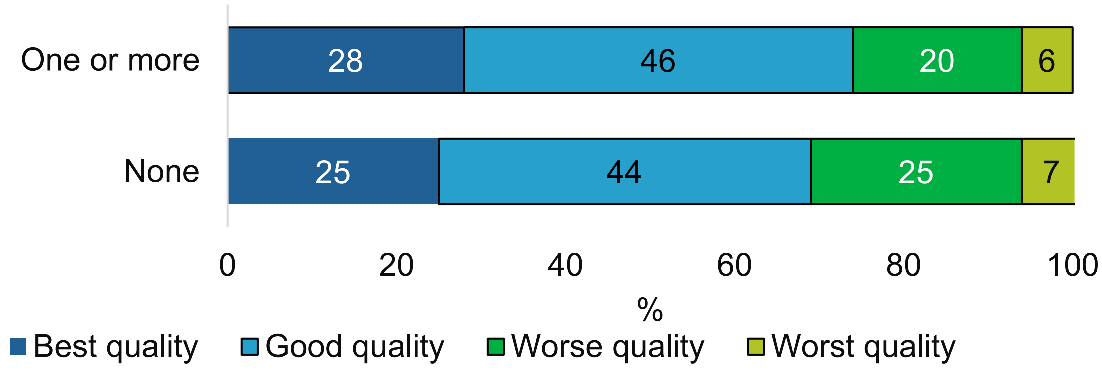


Figure 28: Perceived greenspace quality, by access to a vehicle in the household (%)

Chart notes

1. Data collected between April 2020 and March 2024.
2. The samples for this variable were One or more (74,658), None (17,354).
3. Base: all adults in England.
4. Due to rounding, some percentages add up to 99% or 101%.

Attitudes to Spending Time in Nature

There was a strong relationship between perceived greenspace quality and the importance people place on spending time in nature. For instance, a significant majority (78%) of those who agreed that spending time in nature is important were part of the “Best quality” and “Good quality” segments. In contrast, over half (55%) of those who disagreed with this statement fell into the “Worse quality” and “Worst quality” segments. This pattern may reflect some level of self-selection, where individuals who value nature are more likely to live in areas with high-quality greenspaces. Alternatively, living near quality greenspaces may also foster an appreciation for nature.

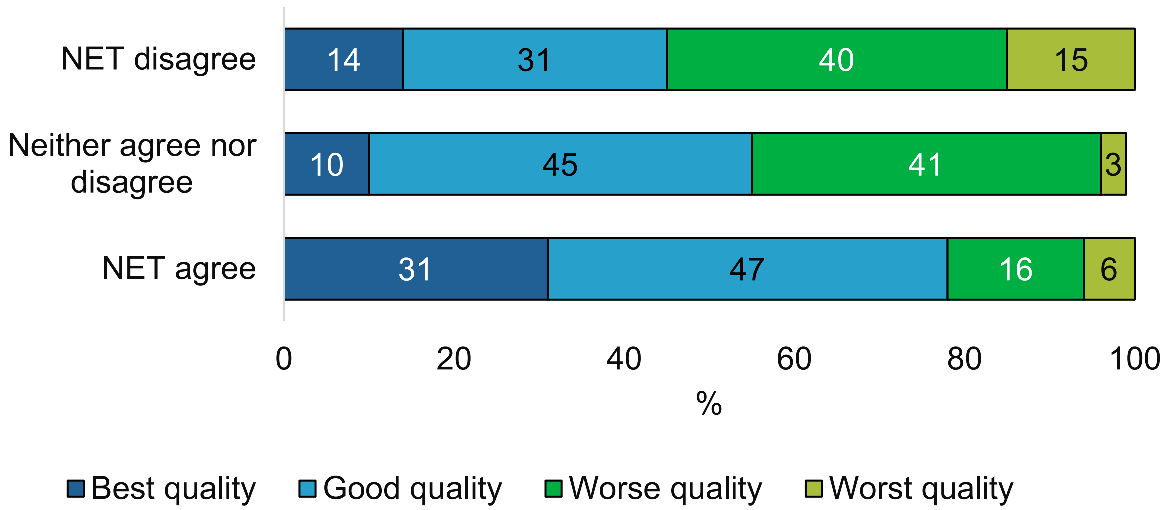


Figure 29: Perceived greenspace quality, by agreement with the statement that spending time in nature is very important to them (%)

Chart notes

1. Data collected between April 2020 and March 2024.
2. The samples for this variable were NET disagree (751), Neither agree nor disagree (2,280), NET agree (14,931).
3. Base: all adults in England.
4. Due to rounding, some percentages add up to 99% or 101%.

Proximity to Green and Natural Spaces

Proximity to green and natural spaces was linked to perceived quality, with those living closer to greenspaces more likely to belong to segments with better quality perceptions. However, a significant proportion of individuals living more than 15 minutes away also reported high satisfaction with the quality of their local greenspaces, with over half (69%) allocated into the “Best quality” and “Good quality” segments.

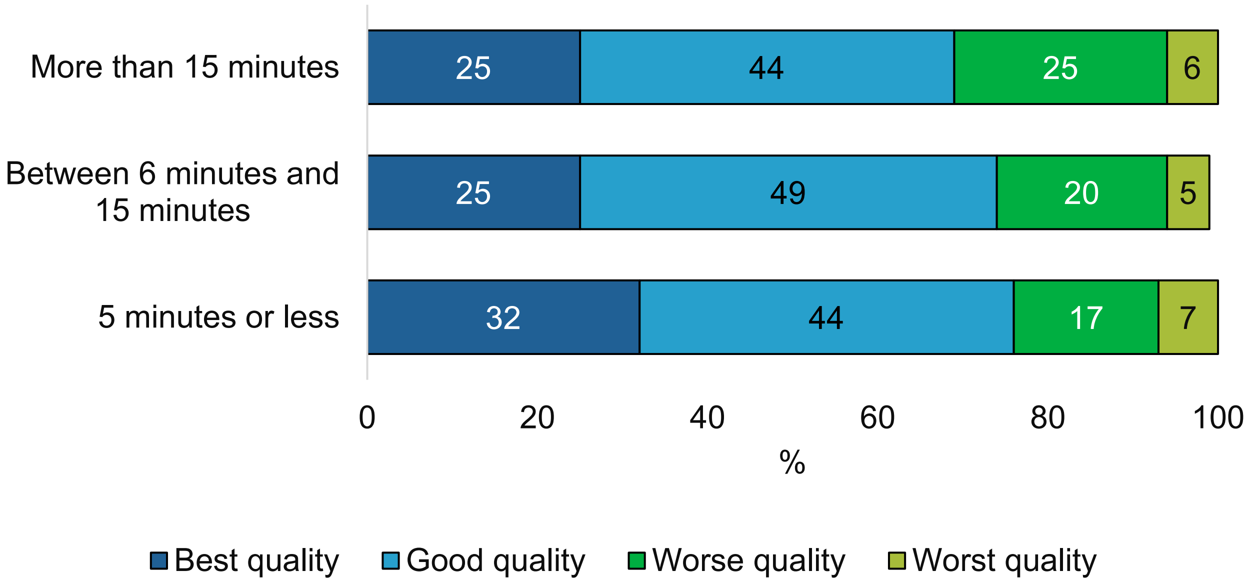


Figure 30: Perceived greenspace quality, by proximity to green and natural spaces (%)

Chart notes

1. Data collected between April 2023 and March 2024.
2. The samples for this variable were More than 15 minutes (5,645), Between 6 minutes and 15 minutes (9,000), 5 minutes or less (7,457).
3. Base: all adults in England.
4. Due to rounding, some percentages add up to 99% or 101%.

Relationship Between Greenspace Quality Perception, Access to and Use of Green and Natural Spaces

Relationship Between Greenspace Quality Perception, Access, and Use

Perceived quality of greenspaces was strongly linked to how often people used them. Those who rated their local greenspaces more positively tended to visit them more frequently. For example, more than half (55%) of individuals in the *Best Quality* segment reported visiting green and natural spaces more than twice a week, compared to just 30% of those in the *Worse Quality* segment.

However, an exception to this trend was seen in the *Worst Quality* segment. Despite their negative perceptions, individuals in this group also reported frequent use of greenspaces. The reasons for this are unclear, though it is worth noting that this segment represents a small proportion of the population (6%), and their higher usage could reflect a reliance on local greenspaces despite dissatisfaction with their quality.

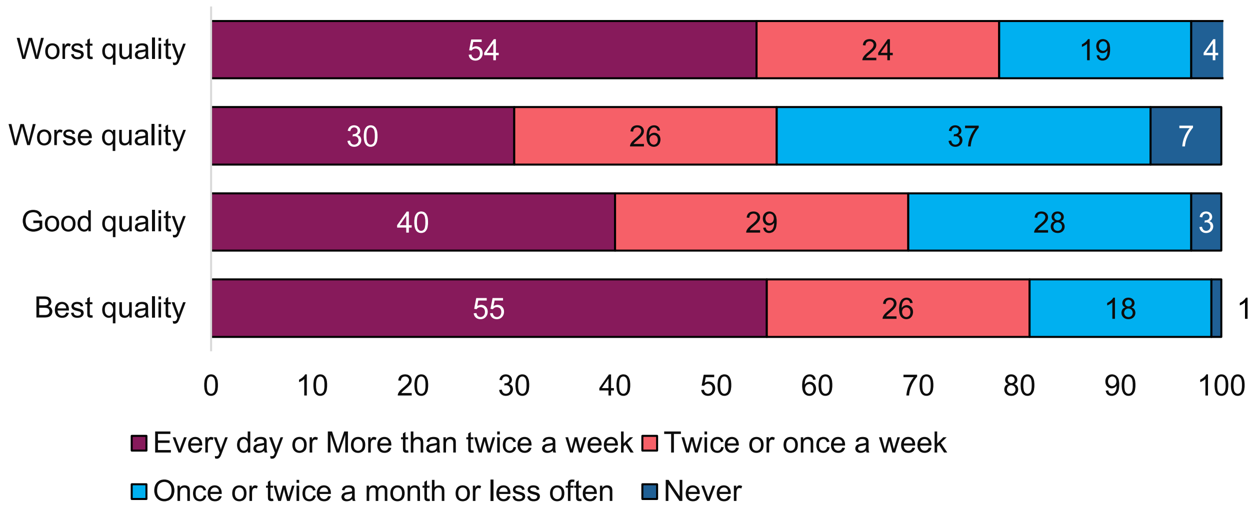


Figure 31: How often people use greenspaces, by perceived quality of greenspaces (%)

Chart notes

Source: M1_Q1. In the last 12 months, how often, on average have you spent free time outside in green and natural spaces?

1. Data collected between April 2020 and March 2024.
2. The samples for this question were Best quality (25,502), Good quality (42,229), Worse quality (18,629), Worst quality (5,645).
3. Base: all adults in England.
4. Due to rounding, some percentages add up to 99% or 101%.

Relationship Between Proximity, Perceived Quality, and Greenspace Use

Proximity to greenspaces was strongly associated with how frequently people visited them. Among those living within a five-minute walk of a greenspace, more than half (51%) reported visiting more than twice a week. In contrast, this figure dropped to one-third (33%) among those living more than 15 minutes away.

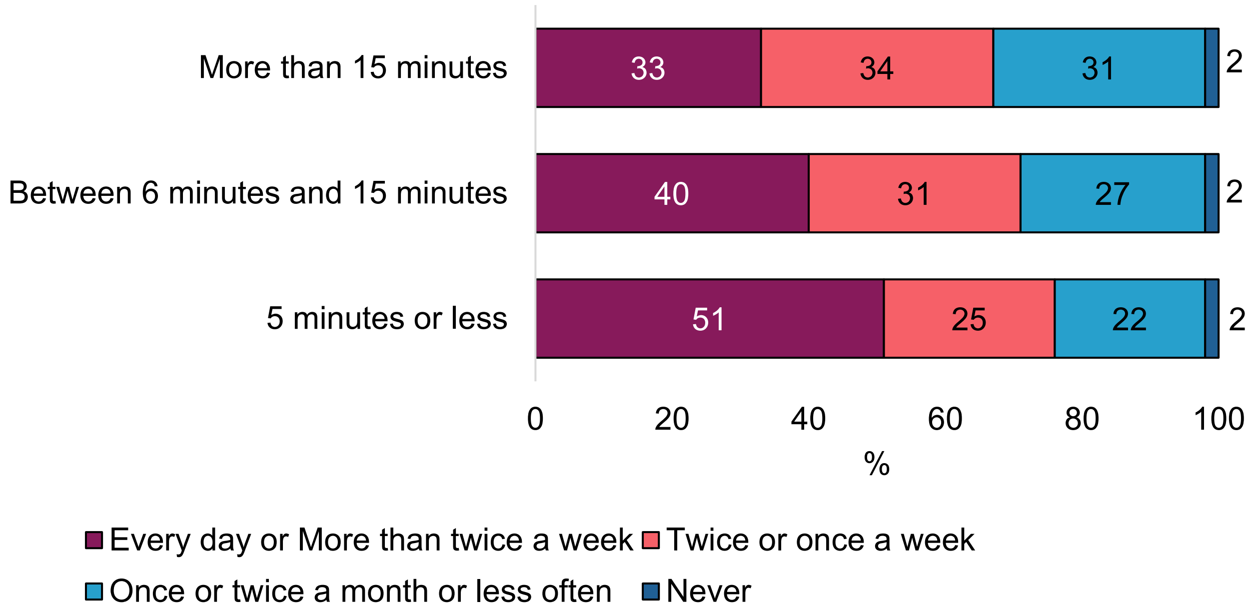


Figure 32: How often people spend time outside in greenspaces, by how long it takes them to walk to their nearest greenspace (%)

Chart notes

Source: M1_Q1. In the last 12 months, how often, on average have you spent free time outside in green and natural spaces?

1. Data collected between April 2023 and March 2024.
2. The samples for this question were More than 15 minutes (5,644), Between 6 minutes and 15 minutes (8,998), 5 minutes or less (7,457).
3. Answer options “Every day” and “More than twice a week” are presented together in the chart.
4. Base: all adults in England, excluding people who never walk to their nearest greenspace.

Both perceived quality and reported proximity played a key role in greenspace use. People who lived closer to greenspaces and those who rated their local spaces as high quality were significantly more likely to visit frequently. This highlights the dual importance of accessibility and quality—ensuring that greenspaces are not only easy to reach but also inviting, well-maintained, and suited to a variety of activities.

Exploring the Relative Importance of Greenspace Quality Perception and Proximity

An overarching goal of this report is to better understand the factors that influence how regularly people spend time outdoors in greenspaces. As described in the previous section, both distance to and quality of local greenspaces are associated with how much time people spend in them. The following section goes beyond this to unpack the relative importance of greenspace proximity and quality in determining how frequently people use those spaces, once the other factor is controlled for. For example, in practical terms, if people view a greenspace as low quality, they may visit it less often even if it is nearby. In contrast, high-quality spaces can encourage people to visit them even if they are further away.

The analysis presented in this chapter then turns to exploring how factors like age, income, ethnicity, and work status might influence greenspace use. These can impact people's lifestyle, including how much they engage with nature. By considering the role of these characteristics the findings in this report shed light on what groups are more or less likely to use green and natural spaces, even when they have the same proximity to and quality of local greenspaces.

Analytical Approach

To examine the factors influencing frequent greenspace use, a binary logistic regression analysis was conducted. This method allows for the estimation of how different characteristics are associated with greenspace use while controlling for other variables. For example, the analysis can determine whether proximity to greenspaces remains an important predictor of use when accounting for perceived quality. By isolating these effects, the model provides a clearer understanding of the independent contributions of different factors.

Defining the Outcome Variable

The dependent variable in the regression is the frequency of greenspace use over the past 12 months. Since binary logistic regression requires a two-category outcome, greenspace use was recoded as follows:

- **Frequent users:** visited green or natural spaces more than twice a week,
- **Less frequent users:** visited green or natural spaces twice a week or less.

The analysis assesses whether each predictor increases or decreases the likelihood of a person being a frequent greenspace user, after adjusting for all other factors.

Predictors Included in the Model

The model includes the following predictors:

- **Proximity to the nearest greenspace** (how long it takes to walk there)
- **Perceived quality of local greenspaces**, based on the segmentation analysis (Best, Good, Worse, and Worst quality)
- **Demographic and lifestyle characteristics**, including:
    - Ethnicity,
    - Household income,
    - Age,
    - Educational qualifications,
    - Work status,
    - Urban vs. rural residence,
    - Access to a vehicle in the household,
    - Dog ownership.

It should be noted that disability was excluded from the model due to multicollinearity between predictors, which indicates that it was highly correlated with other variables in the model (primarily age), making it difficult to isolate its independent effect on greenspace use.

Interpreting the Results

The results of the regression model are visualized in Figure 33 and Figure 34. Each figure highlights different aspects of what influences frequent greenspace use:

- Figure 33 focuses on the impact of proximity to greenspaces and perceived quality (as identified through the segmentation analysis).
- Figure 34. presents findings on socio-demographic characteristics such as age, income, and ethnicity.

In both figures, the blue dots represent odds ratios. These estimate how much more or less likely someone is to visit greenspaces frequently based on different factors. The reference groups for each factor are also shown in the chart.

- An odds ratio above 1 means people in that group are more likely to visit greenspaces regularly compared to the reference group. For example, an odds ratio of 2 means their odds of frequent visits are twice as high.
- An odds ratio below 1 means they are less likely to visit greenspaces frequently compared to the reference group.

Each odds ratio has a confidence interval, represented by a blue line around the point estimate. This shows the range of values that we are 95% confident the true value in the population lies within. If the confidence interval crosses the vertical dotted blue line (which represents 1), it means we cannot be certain the factor has a real impact - its effect is not statistically significant.

The overall results also need to be interpreted within the bigger picture of the assumptions and uncertainties of a binary logistic regression that uses weighted data (such as the data used being made up of observations that are assumed to be independent, as well as predictions being subject to uncertainty).

Proximity and Quality

Proximity

How close people live to their nearest green and natural space is associated with how often they visit them after controlling for the other factors in the model. Compared to people who lived within 5 minutes' walk of their nearest greenspace, people who lived between 6- and 15-minutes' walk were 0.7 times less likely to visit their nearest greenspace more than twice a week, and people who lived more than 15 minutes' walk away were 0.4 times less likely to do so.

Quality

Similarly, the analysis showed perceptions of greenspace quality also affect how often people visit them, after controlling for other factors. People in the segments with “Good quality” or “Worse quality” greenspaces were both less likely to use greenspaces regularly compared to those in the “Best quality” segment:

- The odds of visiting green and natural spaces more than twice a week were 0.6 times lower for people in the Good quality group, compared to those in the Best quality segment.
- The odds were 0.4 times lower for people in the Worse perceived quality of local green and natural spaces segment, compared to those in the Best quality segment.

The "Worst quality" group stands out as an exception to the overall trend. Their odds ratio is close to 1, and the confidence interval crosses the dotted line, indicating that their frequency of greenspace visits is not significantly different from those in the "Best quality" group. This finding is consistent with earlier results showing that, despite their negative perceptions, people in this segment still visit greenspaces regularly.

This group represents a small proportion of the population (6%), making it difficult to draw firm conclusions. Their behaviour does not follow the general pattern observed in other groups, suggesting that additional research would be valuable to better understand why they continue to visit greenspaces frequently despite perceiving them as low quality. Possible explanations could include a lack of alternative options, specific lifestyle habits, or differences in expectations and needs from greenspaces.

These findings underscore the importance of both proximity and quality in promoting frequent use of greenspaces. Simply having a greenspace within easy walking distance is not enough - maintaining and enhancing the quality of these spaces is equally crucial to ensuring they remain inviting and well-used by the community.

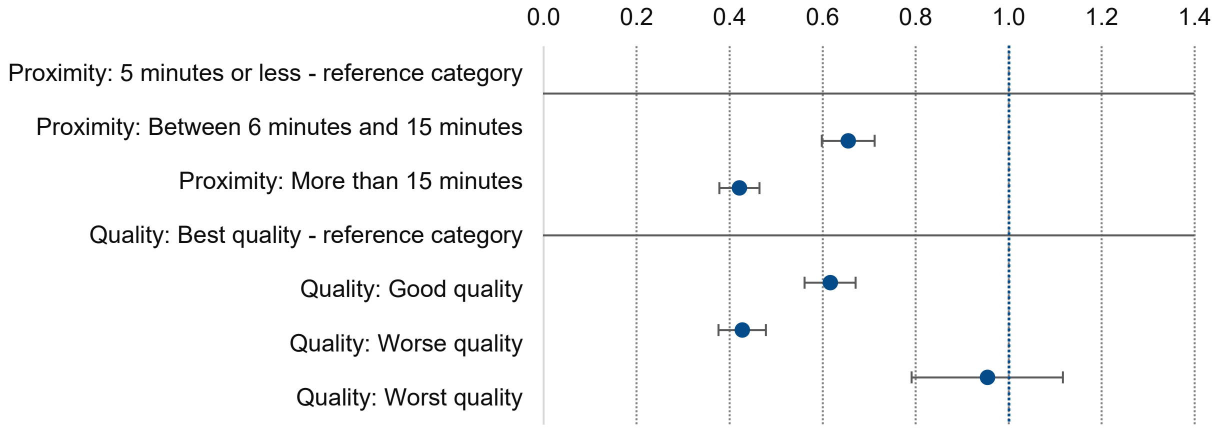


Figure 33: Odds ratios for visiting green and natural spaces more than twice a week (proximity and perceived quality)

Chart notes

1. Data collected between April 2023 and March 2024.
2. The sample for analysis was 22,008.
3. Base: all adults in England, excluding people who never walk to their nearest greenspace.

Secondary Characteristics

After controlling for proximity and quality, several socio-demographic characteristics were also found to influence the likelihood of people using greenspaces often (i.e., more than twice a week). These were:

- **Dog Ownership**: Dog owners were much more likely to use greenspaces regularly compared to non-dog owners.
- **Residence**: Urban residents were less likely to use greenspaces frequently compared to rural dwellers.
- **Income**: Higher household income was associated with more frequent greenspace use. People from households earning under £39,999 were less likely to visit greenspaces regularly than those earning over £60,000. The odds ratios in Figure 14 show a clear trend, with the odds of making frequent greenspace visits increasing as household income rises.
- **Employment**: People in full- or part-time employment were less likely to use greenspaces often compared to the self-employed or retired, while those who are not working due to long term sickness or disability were less frequent users of greenspaces compared with employed people.

  Figure 14 shows that the confidence intervals for the other employment status groups included one, indicating the analysis did not reveal a statistically significant differences between these groups and people in employment.
- **Age**: People aged 25 and above were less likely to use greenspaces frequently compared to those aged 16-24 years old.
- **Education:** People without a university degree were less likely to visit greenspaces more than twice a week, compared to those with a degree-level qualification or above.
- **Ethnicity:** two groups were found to have lower likelihoods of visiting greenspaces frequently (more than twice a week) when compared to White people:
  - People of Asian / Asian British ethnicity.
  - People of Any other ethnic group or background.

These findings suggest that, beyond proximity and quality, a range of socio-demographic factors still influence how often people use greenspaces. Understanding these secondary factors may be important to effectively target interventions and policies aimed at increasing greenspace use across different groups.

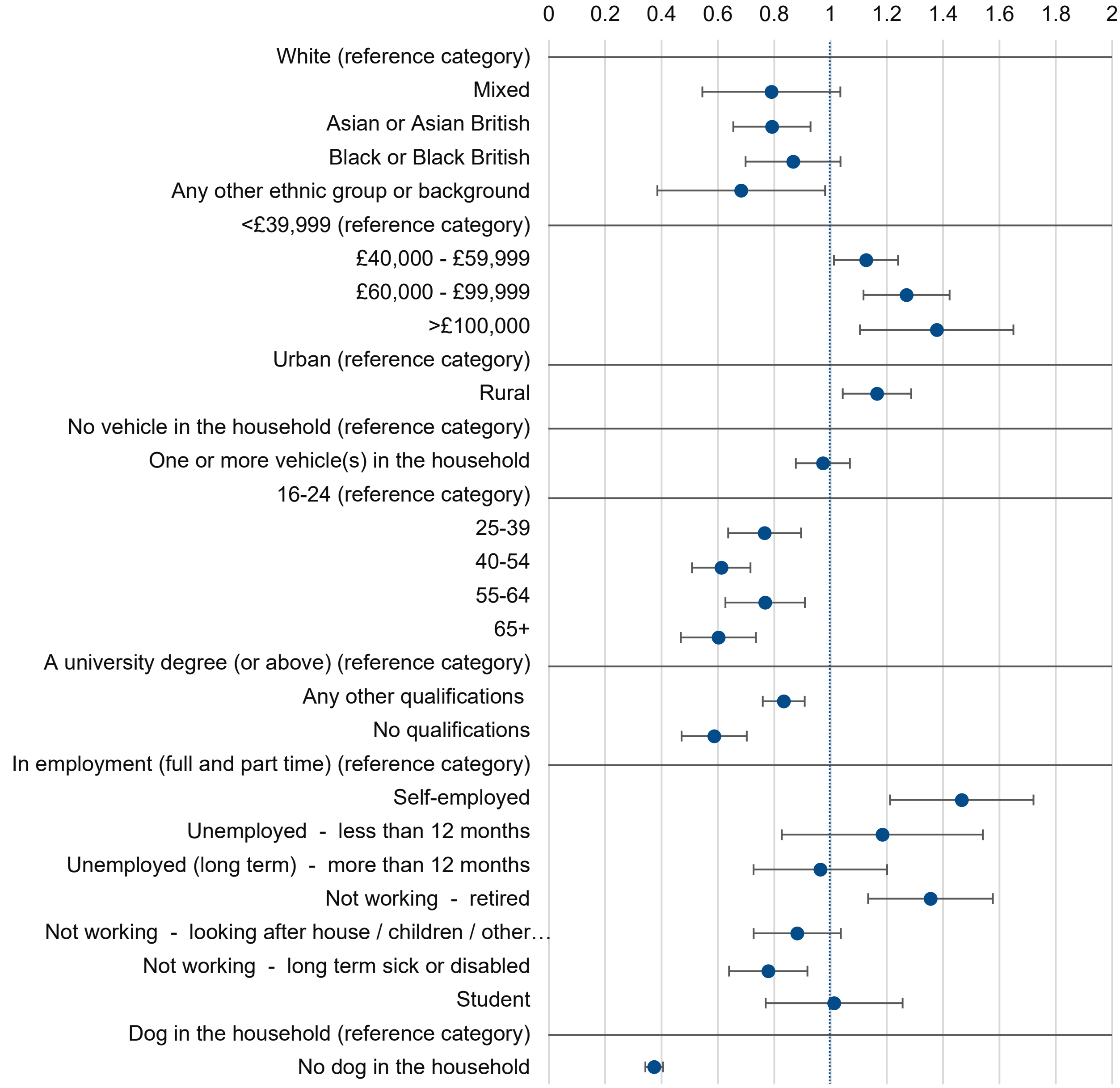


Figure 34: Odds ratios for visiting green and natural spaces more than twice a week (secondary characteristics)

Chart notes

1. Data collected between April 2023 and March 2024.
2. The sample for analysis was 22,008.
3. Base: all adults in England, excluding people who never walk to their nearest greenspace.

Chapter Summary

This chapter examined how people in England perceive the quality of their local greenspaces and how these perceptions influence how frequently they visit them. The analysis identified four distinct groups based on shared perceptions of greenspace quality, ranging from those who consistently rated their local spaces as high quality to those who viewed them as poor. Notably, perceptions of different aspects of quality—such as suitability for relaxation, socialising, or play—tended to align. This coherence suggests that quality dimensions of greenspace may be interconnected and that improvements to greenspaces may have broad benefits across multiple dimensions of user experience.

Perceptions of greenspace quality were not evenly distributed across the population. People from White ethnic backgrounds and those living in rural areas were more likely to report positive perceptions of their local greenspaces, while those in more deprived areas were more likely to report lower quality. This indicates that differences in greenspace provision and maintenance may contribute to disparities in perceived quality.

The analysis also found that both proximity and quality were strongly linked to frequency of use. People who lived closer to greenspaces and those who perceived their local spaces as high quality were more likely to visit them regularly. However, one notable exception was the small group (6%) who rated their local greenspaces as worst quality— yet, they still tended to be frequent visitors.

Finally, greenspace use was shaped by a range of other personal factors, including age, education, household income, employment status (for example, full-time employment), ethnicity, dog ownership, and whether someone lives in an urban or rural area. These findings highlight that different groups may face distinct barriers to accessing and enjoying greenspaces. Understanding these patterns is crucial to ensuring that efforts to promote greenspace engagement account for both structural factors (such as location and quality) and individual circumstances (such as lifestyle and work commitments).

Chapter 3: What People Do in Green and Natural Spaces

Chapter 3 explores how people use green and natural spaces, focussing on the activities they engage in during their visits and how these vary depending on the type of place visited, its distance from home, and the perceived quality of amenities. This chapter also explores whether people considered their visits to be routine or exceptional, and how this perception changes based on travel distance and the types of activities undertaken.

This chapter specifically looks at what people did during their most recent visit to a green and natural space. In the APaNS survey, individuals who had visited such spaces in the past two weeks were asked about the activities they participated in. As a result, this chapter only reflects the experiences of those who had visited a greenspace in the last 14 days, rather than the entire population of England. However, because respondents are recalling recent experiences, their answers are likely to provide a more accurate reflection of their perceptions than if a longer period had elapsed between the visit and the survey.

Research Objectives

The objectives of Chapter Three are:

1. To understand how the activities people take part in during their visits to green and natural spaces differ depending on how far they have travelled.
2. To examine how people describe their visits as either routine or exceptional, based on the location's proximity to their home and the activities they participated in during the visit.
3. To explore whether the type of greenspace visited is associated with the activities people engage in during their visits.
4. To assess how perceived quality of amenities in green and natural spaces impacts the activities people engage in during their visits.

Measuring the Distance Travelled to Green and Natural Spaces

This section explores how the distance people travel to visit a green and natural space is linked to the type of activities they do when they get there. To identify the difference people travelled in the APaNS data, the locations of the spaces (selected by the respondent on Google Maps) was compared to each person's home postcode. This analysis only included visits that started from home.

The visits were then grouped by the distance someone had travelled. Our analyses revealed that there was little difference in activities between very close spaces (up to 300 meters) and close spaces (301 meters to 1 km). Rather, the greatest differences in activities occurred between spaces close to home (within 1 km) and those farther away (beyond 1 km). Therefore, this chapter focuses on comparing visits that were less than 1 km from home to those that were more than 1 km away from home. You can find comparisons of visits within 300 meters to visits between 300 and 1,000 meters in Appendix C. This appendix also presents an assessment of the quality of the journey distance data created by Google Maps, comparing it with self-assessed travel distance and exploring which types of people were most likely to provide the Google Maps information, which had a higher non-response rate than other sections of the survey.

Activities Engaged in During Visits to Green and Natural Spaces

There was a clear link between the distance people travelled to a green or natural space and the types of activities they engaged in during their visits. As shown in Figure 35, walking was the most common activity in spaces near the home, whereas all other activities were more frequently undertaken in locations further away. This suggests that people may be willing to travel longer distances for specific activities.

For example, while only 6% of visits to greenspaces within 1km of home involved picnicking or eating out, this figure rose to 20% for visits to spaces more than 1km away. This highlights that while people tend to visit their nearest greenspace most frequently (see Figure 2), they are more likely to take part in a wider range of activities when travelling further. This pattern suggests that nearby greenspaces are primarily used for casual, everyday activities, whereas more distant locations attract visitors for specific recreational purposes, likely due to the availability of particular amenities or natural features.

It is also worth noting that visits to further-away greenspaces were slightly more common overall. A majority (61%) of visits took place at locations more than 1km from home, while around two in five (39%) were close to home (within 1km). This finding appears somewhat inconsistent with the proximity and visit patterns discussed previously: As discussed in Chapter 1, the majority of people in England (73%) live within 1km of their nearest greenspace, and people overwhelmingly report visiting their nearest greenspace most frequently (78-79%). Yet, the recall-based data from recent visits suggests that a larger proportion of visits (61%) occur more than 1km away.

This could indicate that when asked to recall a specific recent visit, people may be more likely to remember outings to slightly more distant and distinctive greenspaces, rather than visits to their nearest local spaces. Alternatively, it may be that individuals who visit greenspaces more frequently are more likely to visit more distance (vs. nearby) spaces. In either case, it is important to consider that while these findings provide valuable insights into the types of activities people engage in during greenspace visits, they may underrepresent everyday use of nearby greenspaces.

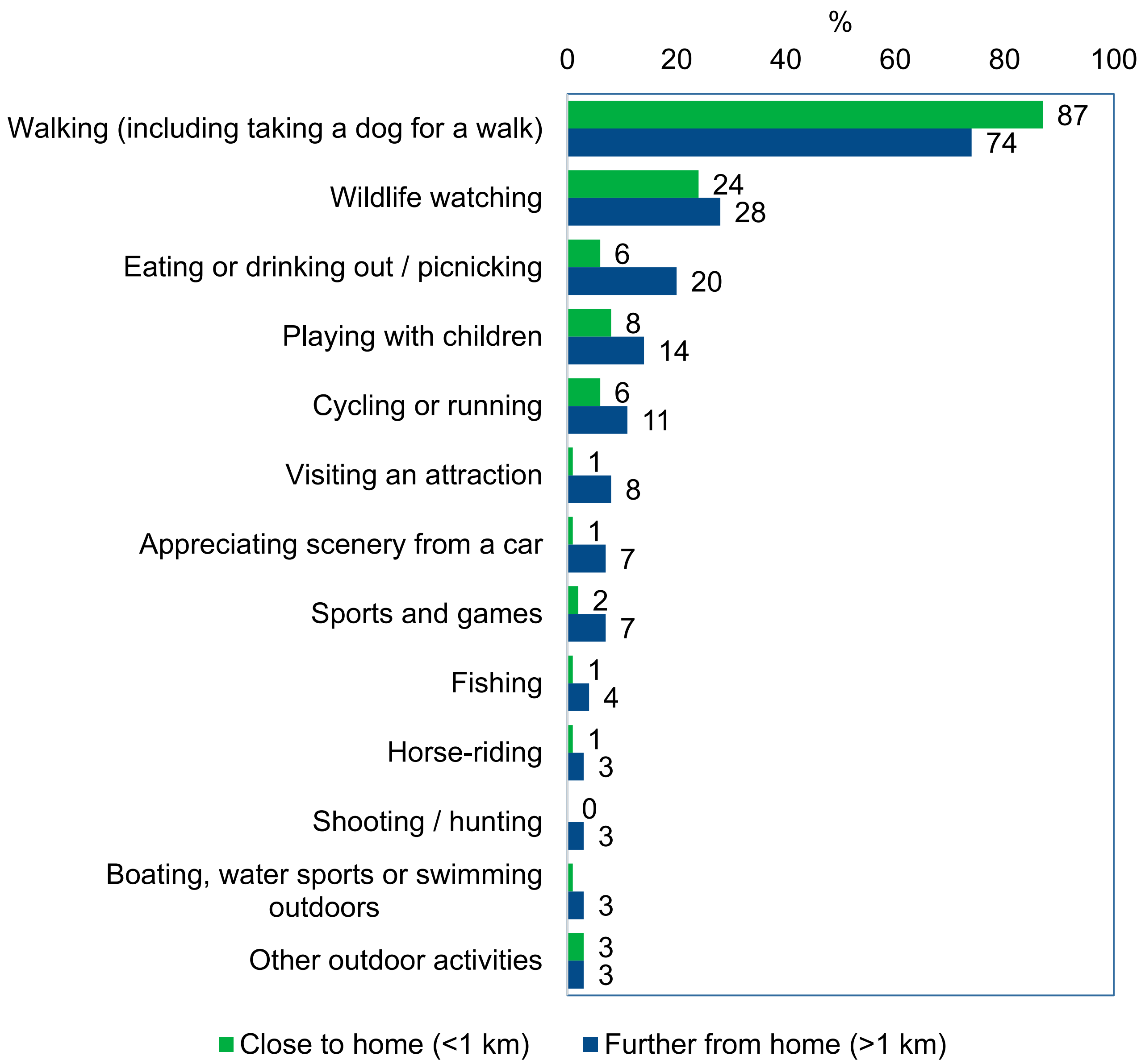


Figure 35: Proportion of visits involving each activity by distance of greenspace to people's home (%)

Chart notes

Source: M2A_Q8A. Which of these activities, if any, did you do on this specific visit?

1. The samples for this variable were Close to home (15,153), Further form home (29,396).
2. Data collected between April 2020 and March 2024.
3. Base: all adults in England who had visited a greenspace in the last 14 days.

Routine and Exceptional Visits

Among people who visited a green and natural space in the 14 days before responding to the APaNS survey, nearly a third (30%) were asked “how routine or exceptional this visit was to you personally”. They could answer on a five-point scale ranging from 1, a “routine experience”, to 5 – an “exceptionally memorable experience”.

Memorability of Greenspace Visits by Distance Travelled

There was a clear trend towards visits being more memorable when people had travelled further to visit a green or natural space. Among visits close to home (less than 1km away) 23% were described as exceptional, compared with 41% for visits further from home (over 1km), as shown in Figure 36 .

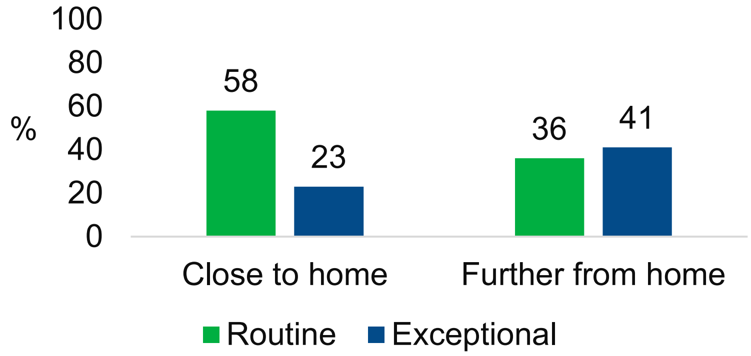


Figure 36: The proportion of visits at each distance threshold that were judged to be exceptional versus routine (%)

Chart notes

Source: M2A_SUB_Q6. Please move the slider to show how routine or exceptional this visit was to you personally?

1. Data collected between April 2020 and March 2024.
2. The samples for this question were Close to home (4,506), Further form home (8,816). This question was asked of 30% respondents who had visited a greenspace in the last 14 days, so the sample sizes are smaller than elsewhere.
3. People were asked to answer on a scale of 1 to 5 where 1 is a routine experience and 5 is an exceptionally memorable experience. The analysis combined answers 1 and 2 into Routine, 3 into Neither routine nor exceptional and 4 and 5 into Exceptional, the middle category is not presented in the chart.
4. Base: all adults in England who had visited a greenspace in the last 14 days.

Activities Engaged in on Routine Visits Compared to Visits People Found Exceptional

The types of activities people engaged in varied depending on whether they considered their visit routine or exceptional. Those who described their visit as exceptional were significantly more likely to have participated in activities beyond walking. For instance, only 2% of routine visits involved sports or games, compared to 12% of visits that were considered exceptional. Figure 37 highlights this trend, showing that exceptional visits are more likely to include a wider range of activities.

This finding reinforces earlier results suggesting that people primarily use nearby greenspaces for casual, everyday activities, while they are more likely to travel further for distinctive or special visits. Although people tend to visit their closest greenspace most frequently, trips to more distant locations play an important role in their overall engagement with nature—potentially offering experiences that feel more impactful or meaningful.

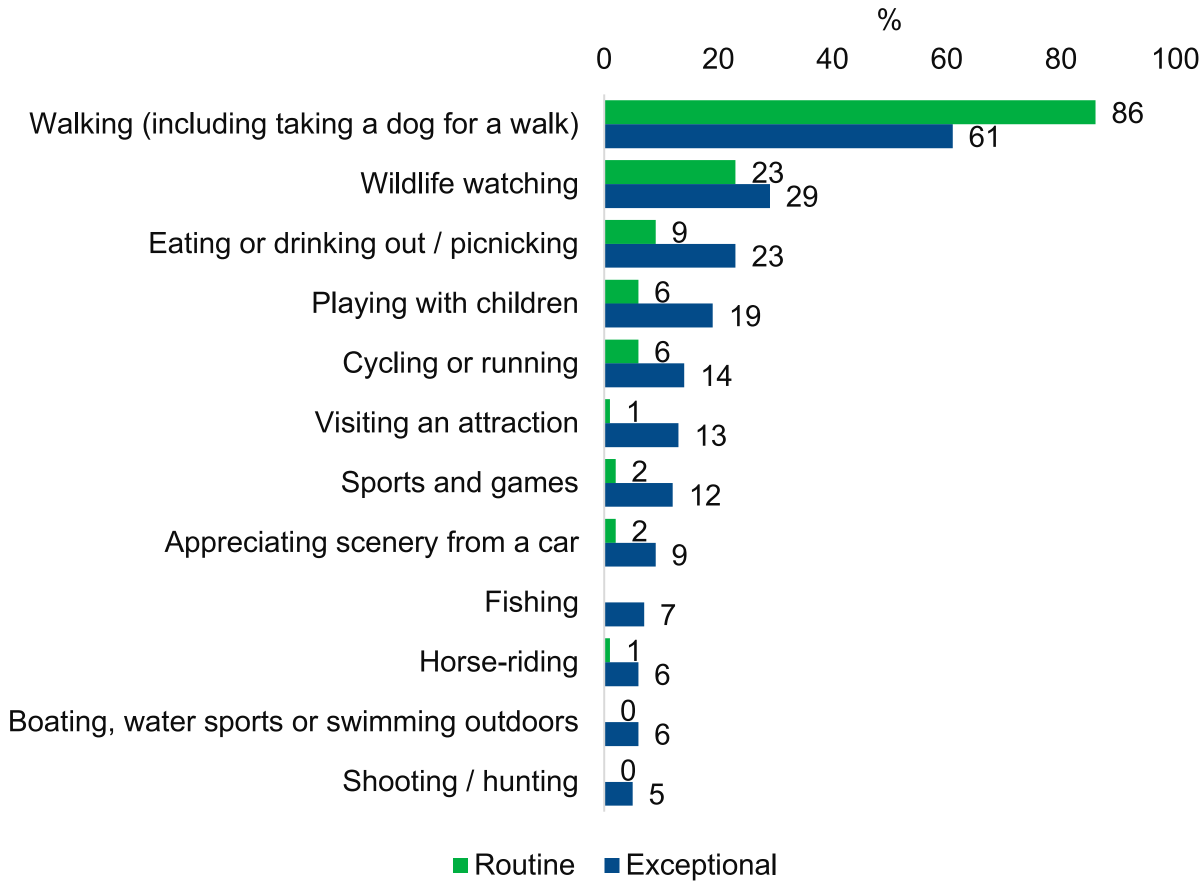


Figure 37: Proportion of visits that included specific activities by people's perceptions of the visit as routine or exceptional (%)

Chart notes

Source: M2A_Q8A. Which of these activities, if any, did you do on this specific visit?

1. Data collected between April 2020 and March 2024.
2. The samples for this question were Close to home (4,506), Further form home (8,816). This question was asked of 30% respondents who had visited a greenspace in the last 14 days, so the sample sizes are smaller than elsewhere.
3. People were asked to answer on a scale of 1 to 5 where 1 is a routine experience and 5 is an exceptionally memorable experience. The analysis combined answers 1 and 2 into Routine, 3 into Neither routine nor exceptional and 4 and 5 into Exceptional, the middle category is not presented in the chart.
4. Base: all adults in England who had visited a greenspace in the last 14 days.

How Do People Use Different Types of Green and Natural Spaces?

This section explores how activities vary depending on the type of green or natural space people visit. The APaNS survey asks about several broad categories of greenspaces, which are shown in Figure 38.

Figure 38 illustrates that walking is the most common activity across all types of greenspaces. In most cases, over 60% of visits involved walking, highlighting its central role in how people engage with outdoor spaces. The only exceptions were allotments and community gardens, as well as hills or moorlands, where walking was less dominant. This suggests that while people visit greenspaces for a range of activities, walking remains the primary way people in England interact with these environments.

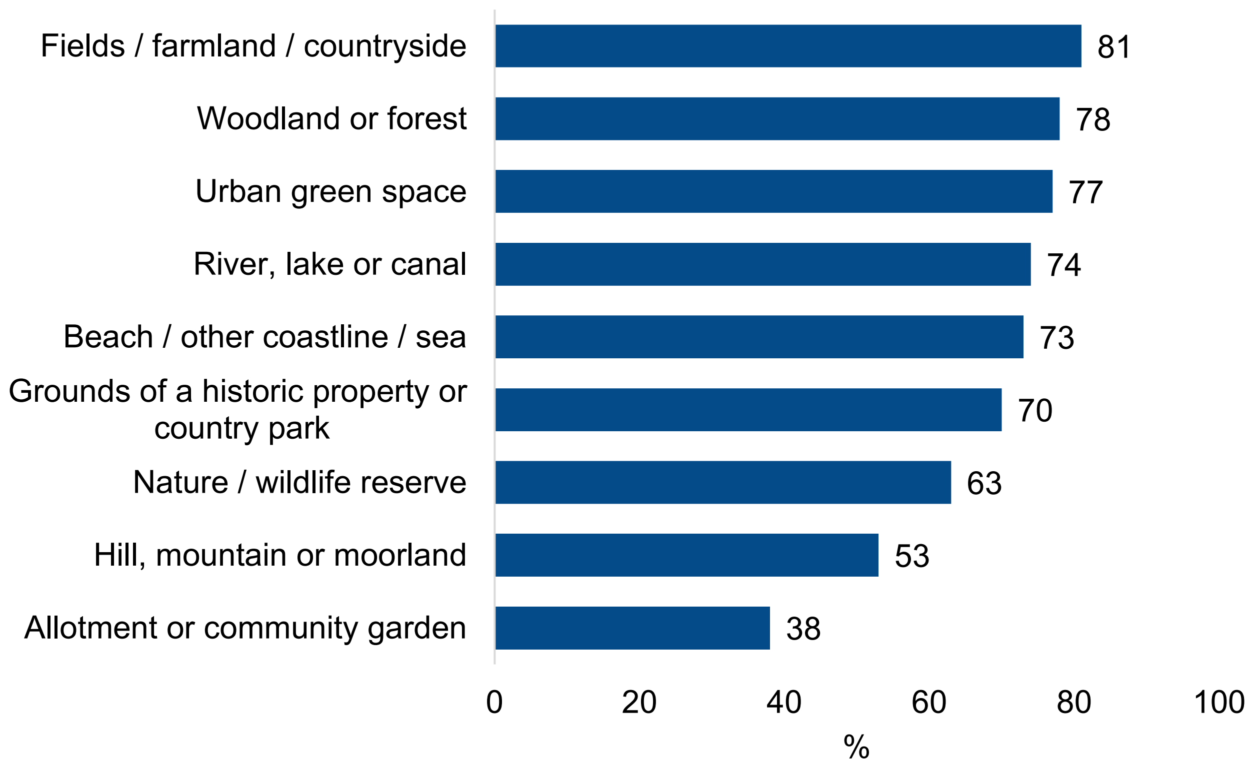


Figure 38: Proportion of visits that involve walking across all greenspace types (%)

Chart notes

Source: M2A_Q8A. Which of these activities, if any, did you do on this specific visit?

1. Data collected between April 2020 and March 2024.
2. The samples for this question were Fields / farmland / countryside (8,662), Woodland or forest (7,344), Urban greenspace (20,726), River, lake or canal (6,884), Beach / other coastline / sea (5,655), Grounds of a historic property or country park (3,130), Nature /

wildlife reserve (3,736), Hill, mountain or moorland (1,550), Allotment or community garden (1,289).
3. Base: all adults in England who had visited a greenspace in the last 14 days.

The Type of Greenspace Visited Played an Important Role in What Activities People Engage in

The type of green or natural space people visit plays an important role in shaping how they use that space. In this section, the analysis focuses on the *main destination* of the person's most recent visit within the last 14 days. For example, if someone visited a wildlife reserve but passed through farmland on the way, the wildlife reserve would be recorded as the main destination if they spent the most time there.

The findings reveal two key patterns:

- **Most greenspaces support a mix of activities, but some are more specialised.** While walking is common across nearly all types of greenspaces, some places stand out for particular activities. For example, wildlife watching is strongly associated with nature reserves, while playing with children is more common in urban greenspaces. These spaces serve unique roles by offering environments well-suited to specific activities.
- **A few types of greenspaces are visited primarily for non-walking activities.** While walking dominates most visits, some spaces are more likely to attract visitors for social, cultural, or recreational reasons. For instance, country parks and historic properties are often visited for attractions, while beaches and coastal areas are more popular for picnicking and eating out.

These patterns are illustrated in Figure 39:

- **Wilder spaces** (e.g., hills, mountains, moorlands, and nature reserves) attract more physically demanding or specialised activities. For instance, 16% of visitors to nature reserves engaged in wildlife watching—significantly higher than the 4–10% seen in other spaces. Similarly, activities like cycling or running (9%) and sports and games (7%) were more common in hilly or mountainous areas, along with rarer niche activities like horse riding, fishing and outdoor water activities.
- **Attraction-focused spaces** (e.g., country parks and the grounds of historic properties) are often visited for specific cultural or leisure activities. Around 11% of visitors to these locations reported attractions as their primary reason for visiting.
- **Food and social activities** are more common in certain settings. Eating or drinking out, or picnicking, was reported by 7% of visitors to beaches and coastal areas, allotments and community gardens, and hill, mountain, or moorland spaces.
- **Urban greenspaces** stand out for family-oriented activities. Around 9% of visits to these spaces involved playing with children, a higher proportion than in other greenspace types.

These findings reinforce the idea that different types of greenspaces enable different kinds of outdoor experiences. While many spaces support a broad mix of activities, some are more strongly associated with particular uses, making variety in greenspace provision important for supporting diverse recreational needs.

A more detailed breakdown of these results is shown in Table 1.

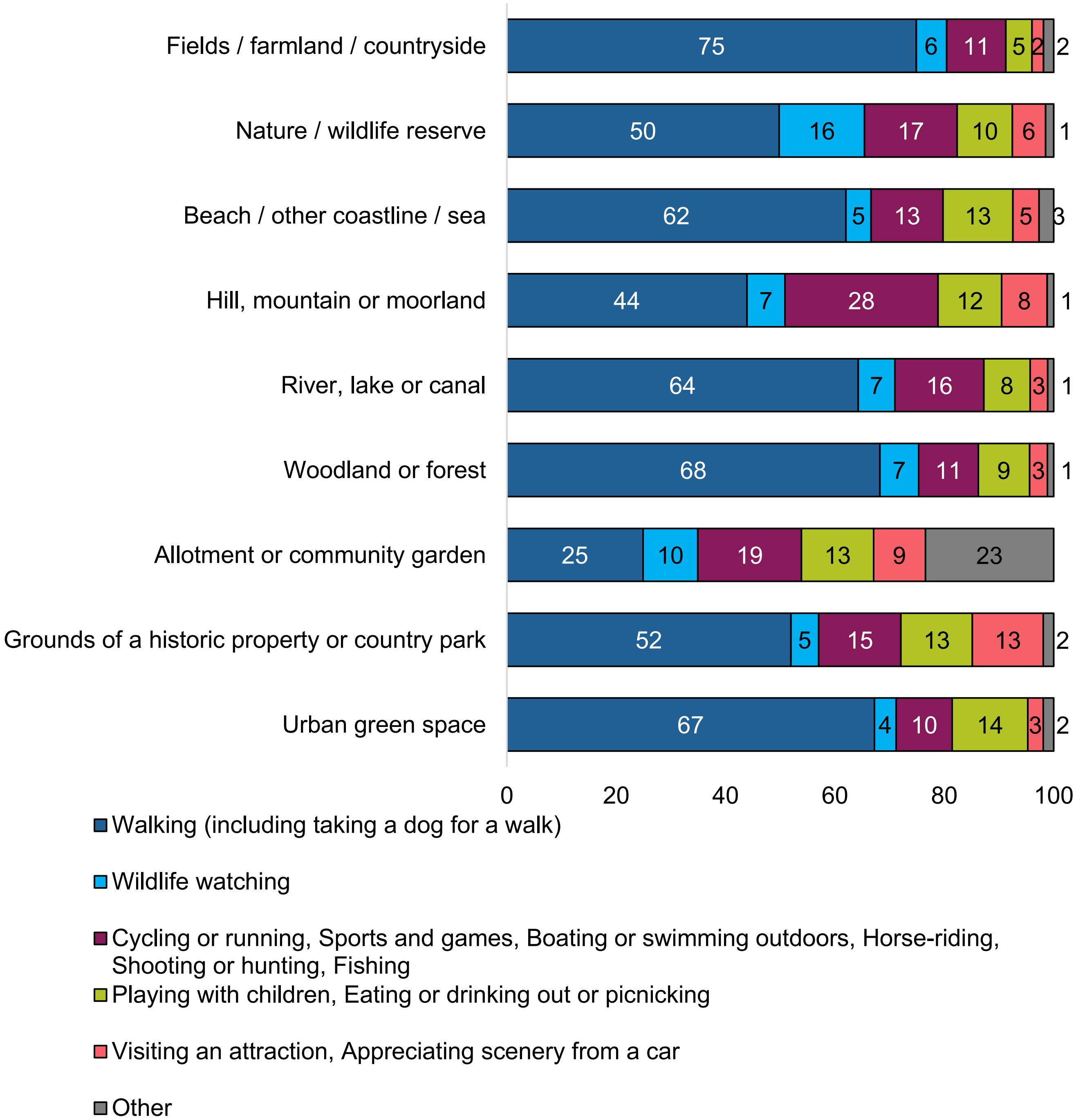


Figure 39: Proportion of visits with specific main activity by greenspace type (%)

Chart notes

Source: M2A_Q8A (Which of these activities, if any, did you do on this specific visit?) and M2A_Q8B (And which would you say was the main activity you did on this specific visit?).

1. Data collected between April 2020 and March 2024.
2. The samples for this question were Fields / farmland / countryside (8,642), Woodland or forest (7,326), Urban greenspace (20,663), Beach / other coastline / sea (5,646), River, lake or canal (6,878), Grounds of a historic property or country park (3,128), Nature / wildlife reserve (3,730), Hill, mountain or moorland (1,549), Allotment or community garden (1,283).
3. Base: all adults in England who had visited a greenspace in the last 14 days.
4. Due to rounding, some percentages add up to 99% or 101%.

Table 1: Percentage of visits with different main activities by type of green and natural space visited

	Fields / farmland / countryside	Woodland or forest	Urban greenspace	River, lake or canal	Beach / other coastline / sea	Grounds of historic property or country park	Nature / wildlife reserve	Hill, mountain or moorland	Allotment or community garden
Walking (including taking a dog for a walk)	75	68	67	64	62	52	50	44	25
Wildlife watching	6	7	4	7	5	5	16	7	10
Cycling or running	6	7	5	7	5	5	7	9	5
Playing with children	2	5	9	4	6	7	6	5	7
Eating or drinking out / picnicking	2	4	5	4	7	6	4	7	7
Sports and games	1	2	3	2	2	3	4	7	6
Visiting an attraction	1	3	2	2	3	11	5	6	5
Fishing	0	1	1	3	1	2	2	3	3
Appreciating scenery from a car	1	1	1	1	2	1	2	3	4
Boating, water sports or swimming outdoors	1	1	0	2	3	2	1	4	2
Horse-riding	2	1	0	0	1	1	0	4	1
Shooting / hunting	1	0	0	2	1	2	2	2	2
Other	2	1	2	1	3	2	1	1	23
Sample	*8,642*	*7,326*	*20,663*	*6,878*	*5,646*	*3,128*	*3,730*	*1,549*	*1,283*

Table notes: This question was only asked of all adults who had visited a greenspace in the last 14 days.

Source: M2A_Q8A (Which of these activities, if any, did you do on this specific visit?) and M2A_Q8B (And which would you say was the main activity you did on this specific Visit?).

How Does the Availability of Amenities Affect the Way People Use a Greenspace?

This section explores how the perceived quality of amenities within green and natural spaces relates to the activities people engage in during their visits. The findings are based on six survey questions where respondents who had visited a green or natural space in the past 14 days were asked to rate their agreement with the following statements on a five-point scale (from “strongly agree” to “strongly disagree”):

1. There were adequate facilities (e.g. car parks, playgrounds, benches, toilets, etc.)
2. There was lots of litter / dog mess / graffiti
3. There was a variety of plants and wildlife to see,
4. The place was accessible and well maintained (including good paths),
5. The place felt welcoming / safe,
6. It was a good place to get fresh air / peace and tranquillity.

Not all of these factors were found to significantly influence how people use greenspaces. This section focuses on perceived adequacy of facilities, cleanliness and feeling that a greenspace is welcoming and safe, as these were the factors most strongly associated with the likelihood of engaging in different activities (the full results are included in the separate tables annexe).

The Role of Having Adequate Facilities

People who perceived their greenspace as having adequate facilities—such as car parks, playgrounds, benches, and toilets—were more likely to engage in a wider range of activities during their visit (Figure 40). For example, 21% of those who agreed that their greenspace had adequate facilities reported eating out, drinking, or picnicking, compared to only 7% of those who disagreed.

The one exception to this pattern was walking, which was more commonly reported by individuals who disagreed that their greenspace had adequate facilities. This suggests that while well-equipped spaces encourage a broader range of recreational activities, walking remains a highly accessible activity that people engage in largely regardless of available amenities.

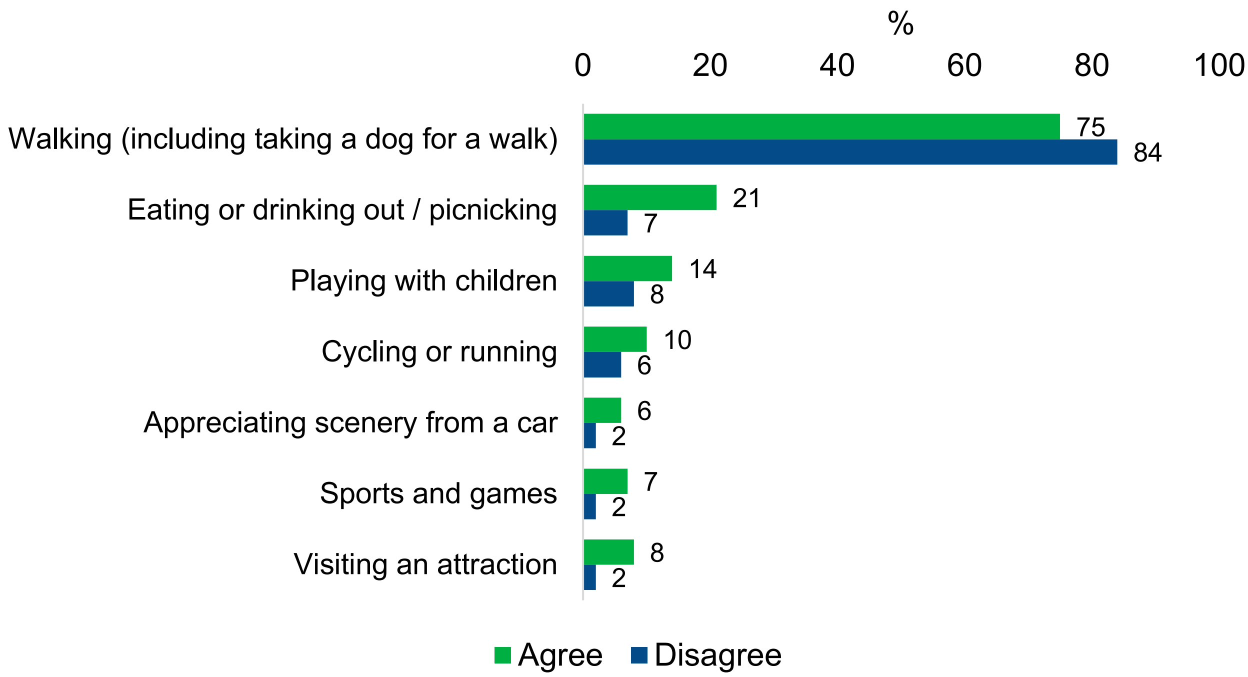


Figure 40: Proportion of visits which included each activity, by whether people agree or disagree that the greenspace had adequate facilities (%)

Chart notes

Source: M2A_SUB_Q7 (b). Thinking about the place that you visited, to what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements: There were adequate facilities (e.g. car parks, playgrounds, benches, toilets, etc.

1. Data collected between April 2020 and March 2024.
2. The sample for this question were NET Agree (10,985), NET Disagree (2,894). This question was asked of 30% respondents who had visited a greenspace in the last 14 days, so the sample sizes are smaller than elsewhere.
3. People were asked to tell whether they agree or disagree on a scale from 1 - Strongly Agree to 5 -Strongly Disagree, the analysis grouped Strongly Agree and Agree into "Agree" and Strongly Disagree and Disagree into "Disagree", the middle answer option "Neither agree nor disagree" is excluded from the chart.
4. Base: all adults in England who had visited a greenspace in the last 14 days.

The Impact of Graffiti, Litter and Dog Mess

These findings reveal a counterintuitive relationship between perceptions of litter, dog mess, or graffiti and the activities people engage in while visiting greenspaces. People who agreed that their greenspace had “lots of litter, dog mess, or graffiti” were actually more likely to take part in several activities. For instance, 19% of those who noticed these issues reported playing with children during their visit, compared to only 9% of those who disagreed. A similar pattern was observed for other activities, as shown in Figure 41.

The only exception was walking: 82% of those who disagreed that the space had “lots of litter, dog mess, or graffiti” reported walking, compared to 57% of those who agreed.

Several factors could explain this pattern. It may be that engaging in certain activities—such as playing with children—draws greater attention to issues like litter, making them more noticeable. Alternatively, these activities may be more common in high-footfall areas, which are naturally more susceptible to litter and graffiti. It is also important to remember that these results reflect individual perceptions, which may vary based on expectations. People who value greenspaces highly—and use them more frequently—may have stricter standards for cleanliness, leading them to be more critical of litter levels even in well-used spaces.

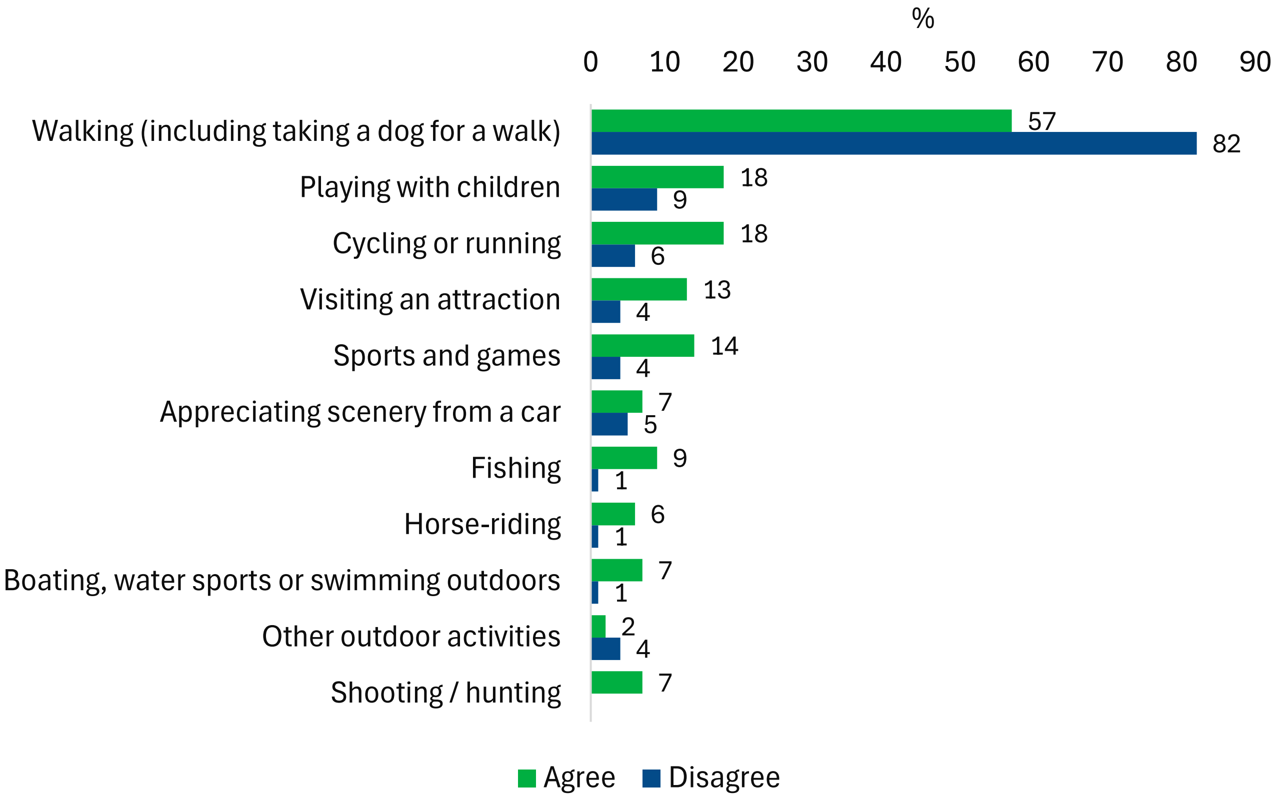


Figure 41: Proportion of visits which included each activity, by whether people agree or disagree the greenspace had lots of litter, dog mess, or graffiti (%)

Chart notes

Source: M2A_SUB_Q7 (d). Thinking about the place that you visited, to what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements: There was lots of litter / dog mess / graffiti.

1. Data collected between April 2020 and March 2024.
2. The sample for this question were NET Agree (4,392), NET Disagree (11,084). This question was asked of 30% respondents who had visited a greenspace in the last 14 days, so the sample sizes are smaller than elsewhere.
3. People were asked to tell whether they agree or disagree on a scale from 1 - Strongly Agree to 5 -Strongly Disagree, the analysis grouped Strongly Agree and Agree into “Agree” and Strongly Disagree and Disagree into “Disagree”, the middle answer option “Neither agree nor disagree” is excluded from the chart.
4. Base: all adults in England who had visited a greenspace in the last 14 days.

The Importance of Greenspace Being Perceived as Welcoming and Safe

Perceptions of greenspaces as welcoming and safe also influenced the types of activities people engaged in during their visits. People who agreed that the greenspace was welcoming and safe were more likely to go walking, watch wildlife, or eat and drink outdoors (Figure 42). For instance, 74% of those who felt the space was welcoming and safe reported walking during their visit, compared to 54% of those who disagreed.

In contrast, those who disagreed—meaning they perceived the space as unsafe or unwelcoming—were more likely to take part in activities such as playing with children, cycling or running, visiting attractions, or participating in sports and games.

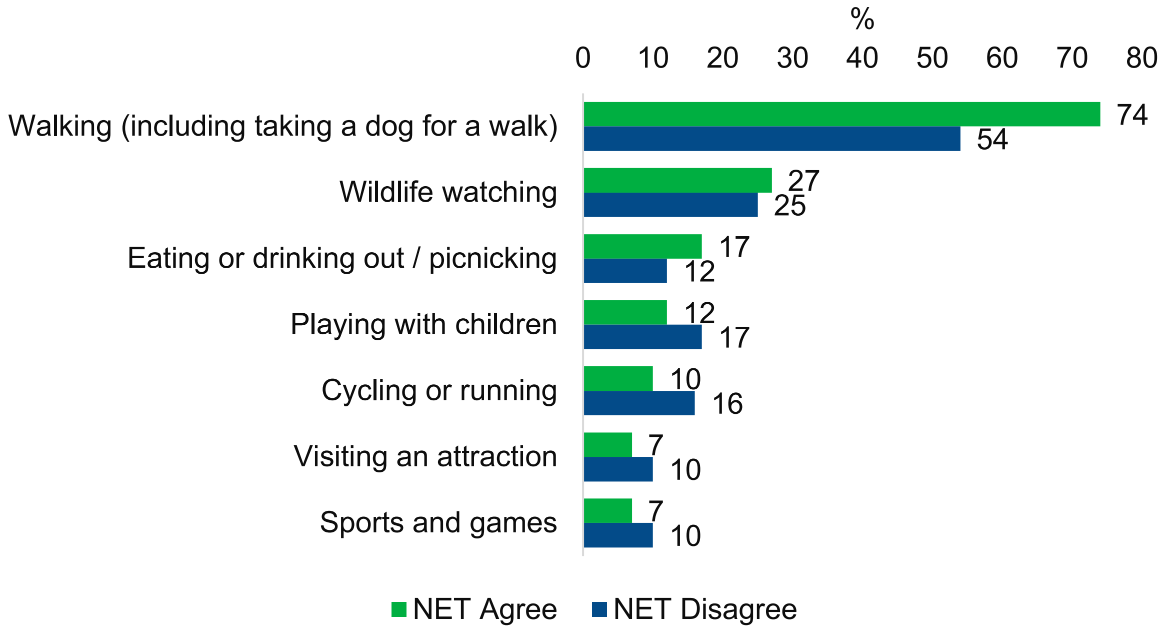


Figure 42: Proportion of visits which included each activity, by whether people agree or disagree the greenspace felt welcoming and safe (%)

Chart notes

Source: Source: M2A_SUB_Q7 (e). Thinking about the place that you visited, to what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements: The place felt welcoming / safe.

1. Data collected between April 2020 and March 2024.
2. The sample for this question were NET Agree (14,898), NET Disagree (601). This question was asked of 30% respondents who had visited a greenspace in the last 14 days, so the sample sizes are smaller than elsewhere.
3. People were asked to tell whether they agree or disagree on a scale from 1 - Strongly Agree to 5 -Strongly Disagree, the analysis grouped Strongly Agree and Agree into “Agree” and Strongly Disagree and Disagree into “Disagree”, the middle answer option “Neither agree nor disagree” is excluded from the chart.
4. Base: all adults in England who had visited a greenspace in the last 14 days.

Chapter Summary

By far the most common activity in green and natural spaces is walking, making it the cornerstone of greenspace use in England. However, the distance travelled to reach a greenspace plays a significant role in shaping how people use it. When visiting spaces further from home (more than 1km), people are much more likely to engage in a diverse range of activities beyond walking, such as eating, drinking, picnicking (20% of visits), or visiting attractions (7%)—compared to much lower rates of these activities in visits to spaces within 1km of home. Nonetheless, walking remains the most frequent activity, even in more distant spaces.

The perception of a visit as exceptional or routine is also shaped by distance and activities. Visits to further-away spaces (over 1km) are more likely to be considered exceptional, while those closer to home are more often seen as routine. Additionally, exceptional visits tend to involve activities other than walking, reinforcing the idea that more distant greenspaces are often used for special or planned outings, whereas nearby spaces support frequent, everyday visits.

These findings suggest that different types of greenspaces serve distinct roles in people's outdoor experiences. Local greenspaces (within 1km) are essential for routine, frequent use, ensuring people can easily integrate time in nature into daily life. Meanwhile, more distant spaces (beyond 1km) offer opportunities for a broader range of activities and more memorable experiences.

Beyond distance, the type of greenspace visited also plays a role in shaping activities. Some spaces, such as urban parks, beaches, or nature reserves, are more closely associated with specific activities—for example, wildlife watching is most common in nature reserves, while playing with children is more frequent in urban greenspaces. This highlights the importance of a diverse mix of greenspaces, both near and far, to enable a variety of outdoor experiences.

Taken together, these findings highlight the complementary roles of local and more distant greenspaces. While nearby spaces facilitate consistent, everyday outdoor activity, larger or more specialised spaces further away allow for a wider variety of outdoor experiences. Future planning efforts could consider how to balance both—ensuring easy access to well-connected walking routes and amenities for local spaces, while also maintaining accessibility to diverse, more distant greenspaces through transport links and infrastructure.

Chapter 4: Experiences of Local Greenspaces

Introduction

This chapter presents the results of the qualitative research, and is structured around the research objectives for this method. The findings in this chapter supplement the secondary analysis in chapters one to three. The findings are based on focus groups with both users and non-users of perceived high- and low-quality green and natural spaces near their homes. The focus groups were intended to build on Chapters 1 to 3 by providing deeper insight into participants' experiences of their local green and natural spaces. A purposive sampling approach was used to select participants with at least one green or natural space within 1km or a 15-minute walk of their home, and who perceived their local green or natural space(s) as high- or low-quality (see Appendix D Qualitative Methodology for details). This approach allowed us to explore participants' views, motivations and behaviours in depth regarding their use or non-use of these spaces. The superordinate themes with their respective sub-themes are shown in Figure 43.

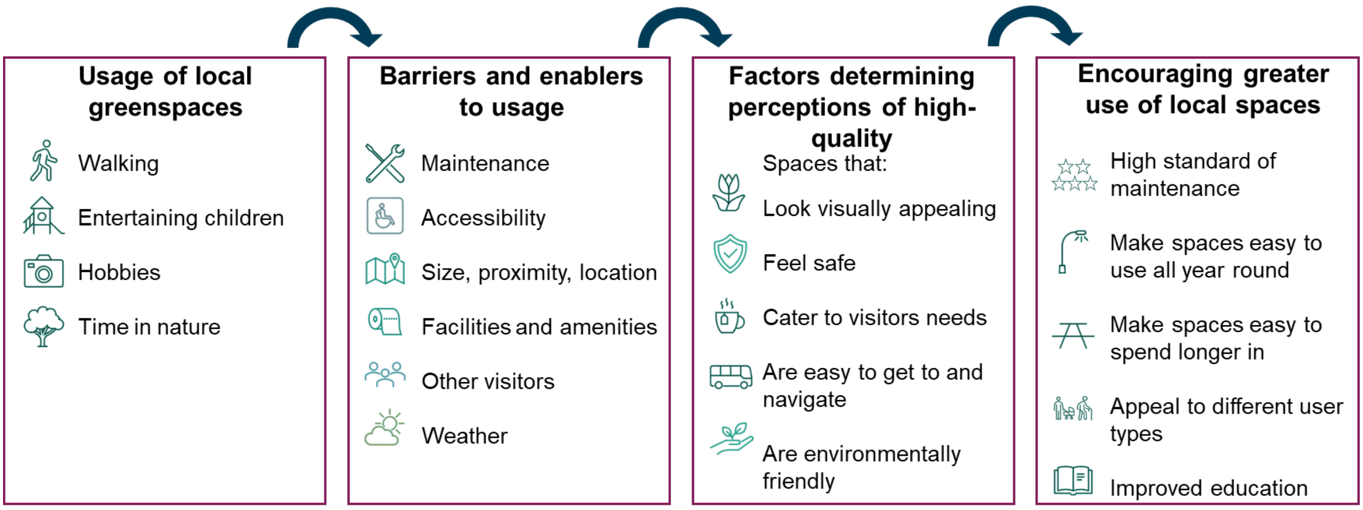


Figure 43: Overview of qualitative research findings

Interpreting the Qualitative Findings

The findings in this chapter avoid giving numerical findings, since qualitative research cannot support numerical analysis. This is because purposive sampling seeks to achieve range and diversity among the sample rather than to build a statistically representative sample. Instead, the qualitative research provides in-depth insight into the range of experiences and views.

Throughout the chapter the term 'regular' or 'frequent' user is used to describe those who used their local

spaces at least a few times per month. 'Infrequent- or non-user' is used to describe those who used their local spaces at most a few times each year. Research Objectives

1. The objectives of Chapter Four are: Identify the different ways people use greenspaces close to home.
2. Examine the factors that influence individuals' choices of which greenspace to visit, for those with access to multiple local greenspaces.
3. Investigate the key determinants of whether individuals perceive their local green and natural spaces as high or low quality.
4. Explore the barriers that prevent people from using greenspaces within a 15-minute walk of their home.
5. Assess the factors that would encourage people to make greater use of these spaces.

Research Findings

How Do People Use their Local Green and Natural Spaces

This section explores the extent to which people use their local green and natural spaces, the activities they carry out there, and how this varies for different users.

Both regular and infrequent users primarily used their local green and natural spaces for walking. This included walks for both leisure and exercise, and was consistent across different types of spaces (including parks, canals, open countryside, beaches and woodland), as well as being year-round.

Frequent Users

Among regular users, other activities included entertaining children (for example, activities in playgrounds); pursuing a hobby (such as photography or bird watching); or just spending time in nature by themselves and / or with family and friends (especially for those without gardens). This group included individuals for whom regular time outdoors had become embedded in their daily lives during the COVID-19 lockdowns. Time spent in local greenspaces was seen as an important free alternative to other local spaces (such as cafes).

In general, regular users enjoyed spending time outdoors connecting with nature and described improved mental and physical wellbeing as benefits of doing so:

> *"Connecting with nature, and you can just clear your head and think…. The problem is at home we've got the pull of technology. Which is not a bad thing, but it's addictive, isn't it."* User of local spaces

Infrequent and Non-Users

Infrequent users of local greenspaces tended not to use these spaces often for reasons related to personal preferences, their lifestyle or the spaces themselves. This group included individuals who had less intrinsic interest in spending time outdoors. Instead, they preferred indoor activities such as reading, watching films or cooking. This included individuals who lived near perceived high quality green spaces.

Others described having used the spaces more frequently in the past (and wished to do so again) but had since had a lifestyle change (such as childcare or work commitments) which made it challenging to prioritise spending time outdoors.

> *"Whether you've gone to work or you've got to pick your kids up from school, by the time you're done with that part of the day…it's just dark and everything's closed. So…that really restricts how much opportunity you have."* Non-user of perceived low-quality spaces

Others had gotten out of the habit of regular outdoor exercise during the COVID-19 lockdowns and had struggled to pick this up again. These individuals tended to use spaces when motivated to do so by others (for example, when grandchildren visited).

Other infrequent users enjoyed time in nature (similarly to regular users) but were discouraged from using their local spaces because they were perceived as low-quality, that is, they felt unsafe or unpleasant to spend time in. This will be discussed in more detail in later sections of this chapter. These participants preferred to travel to spaces further away (up to a 30-minute drive) that better met their needs.

Enablers and Barriers to Using Local Green and Natural Spaces

This section explores the barriers and enablers to using local green and natural spaces for both users and non- or infrequent users. For users of local green and natural spaces, this includes factors influencing choice between multiple local spaces.

Features of the Space

Users and non-users described multiple features of spaces that could either act as an enabler or barrier to use, including maintenance, proximity, size, location, and accessibility.

Maintenance. Both users and non-users preferred spaces that were pleasant looking and had features of interest. Spaces with different types of wildlife, greenery, flowers and water features were favoured over more 'barren' spaces. Maintenance and upkeep of the space were significant factors in ensuring spaces were pleasant to spend time in. For this reason, regular users with access to multiple local spaces tended to choose one that was better maintained.

Size, proximity and location. Both users and non-users tended to prefer spaces that were sufficiently large to provide a sense of ‘being in nature’ and did not feel crowded or too busy.

> *“I think if they're smaller then it's like you really have to share the space. Obviously, you don't want to irritate people if you're too close to them...”* Non-user of perceived high-quality spaces

Larger spaces had scope to offer activities that appealed to a wider range of users. Infrequent or non-users with small local spaces therefore preferred to travel to larger spaces that offered more.

At a minimum, regular users felt a space should be large enough to accommodate a length of walk that made visiting ‘worthwhile’ (around 1 to 2 miles). However, for users with multiple spaces there was a trade-off between size and proximity. At times, convenience was prioritised and users preferred closer smaller spaces they could visit around work commitments (for example, during their lunch break) or combine with other errands (such as shopping). At other times a larger space was preferred due to the purpose of their visit (for example, a longer walk).

Amongst infrequent or non-users were individuals who also preferred travelling to spaces away from built up urban areas to feel more relaxed and connected with nature:

> *“I quite like to feel like I'm going out in nature properly…more chance to find wildlife and nature in some of the more slightly remoter places… versus that where I can see the houses, and hear cars...”* Non-user of perceived low-quality spaces

Accessibility. There were two important aspects to accessibility for participants: how easy it was to get to the greenspace and how easy it was to navigate the space once there. Non- or infrequent users whose spaces were in inconvenient or undesirable locations found this to be a key barrier to use. Where busy roads were unavoidable, participants preferred to travel to local spaces by car or public transport (particularly if visiting with children or if they had reduced mobility). It was therefore important to have adequate and free carparking and bus provision.

Once there, participants wanted even surfaces on trails and walkways (or signage to point out hazards where this wasn’t possible), sufficiently wide paths to allow visitors to pass each other easily, and greenery to be regularly pruned to avoid paths becoming overgrown. These measures were particularly important for older visitors, those with reduced mobility (for example, with wheelchair users) and those visiting with children.

> *“I'm actually registered disabled. So actually having paths that you can go on because obviously there is sometimes I do need to use a wheelchair, and if they're not maintained, you'll end up just having to turn and go away.”* Non-user of perceived low-quality spaces

Facilities or Amenities Available in the Space

Across users and non-users, the type and number of facilities available in the space influenced their usage of the space. The facilities that participants preferred to have on offer varied depending on the type and location of the space:

> *"If you go to a country park where there are lakes and lots of different recreational areas, then you probably expect something more than an urban town park…I think there is quite a variety of outdoor spaces, and your expectations will be different depending on which one you're attending."* User of local spaces

In particular, those in rural areas preferred spaces that were relatively untouched and natural, whereas those living near urban parks wanted a range of amenities. In general, those in urban or suburban areas with multiple spaces nearby tended to choose a space that offered toilets, cafes, shops, playparks or sports courts. Non-users too preferred to travel further to go to spaces with a wider range of facilities available.

The Role of other Visitors

Among users and non-users, other visitors could be both an enabler and barrier to use. Generally, participants liked to see other visitors in the spaces as it made them feel safer. For participants with children, the presence of other families in the spaces made them feel more at ease.

In contrast older participants, particularly retirees, found the presence of a lot of children off-putting (they preferred quiet and calm spaces). Similarly, a large number of runners or cyclists deterred some participants from walking in certain spaces at certain times (for example, during Saturday morning park runs), as did dogs off the leash.

The fear of antisocial behaviour in the spaces was a particularly significant factor for those close to perceived low-quality spaces. This included illegal activities like cannabis smoking, underage drinking, and drug dealing. They spoke about feeling an increased sense of safety in spaces further away.

> *"The one closer to me, it's quite unsafe. You hear a lot of weird stuff that goes around in there, so it's not very inviting to go in […] [the park further away from home] is just safe, there's parking facilities, so you don't need to worry about cars being broken into."* Non-user of perceived low-quality spaces

Weather and Seasonal Changes

For both users and non-users, cold and wet weather, especially during the winter, was a barrier to using the spaces. Wet conditions often made pathways slippery and the grounds unsuitable for leisure activities like walking. Non-users described not having suitable footwear for these conditions.

> *"Some of the pathways near us are muddy. There's no covering to them, so if the weather does go bad, it can get quite slippery"* Non-user of perceived high-quality spaces

Others described feeling less safe in the spaces in the winter months because of the shorter daylight hours.

While using the spaces during the summer was generally easier, other barriers to use were prevalent at this time of year. Both users and non-users pointed to an increase in anti-social behaviour during good weather (particularly public drinking and drug use) as well as overflowing bins. This problem was more prevalent in urban than rural areas. Non-users who did not enjoy spending time outdoors in general were also deterred by the increase in bugs and insects during warmer months.

Factors Determining Quality Perceptions of Green and Natural Spaces

This section explores people's understanding of what makes a greenspace high-quality. Natural England's definition of a 'high-quality' space is one that functions well and meets people's needs. Unsurprisingly, there was substantial overlap between the enablers and barriers to using local greenspaces and the factors that made participants perceive a space as high- or low- quality.

As with the enablers and barriers, participants' perceptions of 'quality' were influenced by the type of greenspace and how they preferred to use it, however participants' understanding of 'quality' had a number of common factors. While most factors were raised across the groups, there was greater emphasis placed on some than others by users compared to non-users.

Spaces Feel Safe to Visit

Feeling safe in the space was the most important 'quality' factor across participant groups. There were two different aspects to safety for participants; safety from trips and falls due to the terrain in the spaces; and safety from other users.

In relation to the second aspect, spaces that were designed or had other measures to discourage anti-social behaviour were perceived as high-quality. While participants felt that ensuring spaces were well maintained helped with this, other measures included good lighting during winter evenings and CCTV.

Spaces are Visually Appealing and Well Maintained

Participants, including both users and non-users, associated high-quality with spaces that are visibly 'appealing'. This meant spaces are well-maintained, which included grass being regularly mowed, flowerbeds being planted up, outdoor furniture (such as benches) that is not damaged or broken, and spaces that are clean and free of rubbish and dog mess.

Spaces Cater to the Needs of Different Visitor Types

Non-users in particular saw high-quality spaces as those that cater to the needs of different types of visitors all year round. This included those using the spaces for exercise, for peaceful time in nature, those visiting with children and older visitors or those with reduced mobility.

> *"For me, it's different spaces [..] for children, for dog walking, a cafe, etc. That would be a nice space so everybody can use it the way they wish to." Non-user of low-quality space*

The scope of what could be offered depended on the size of the spaces, but spaces perceived as high-quality at a minimum offered basic amenities (such as clean and safe public toilets nearby that were free to use and open every day). They acknowledged, however, that this meant those misusing spaces could also be encouraged to use them.

Spaces are Easily Accessible

This factor was particularly important amongst infrequent or non-users living near both perceived high- and low- quality spaces. While proximity was important (all had spaces within 1km of their home), perceived high-quality spaces could be easily reached on foot, by car or public transport, without having to navigate busy or badly laid out roads. Spaces perceived as high quality were also well laid out so that it was straightforward to navigate between different areas or amenities.

Spaces are Environmentally Friendly

Across groups, but particularly among regular users in rural areas, measures to ensure spaces were environmentally friendly and considered the implications of climate change were important aspects of perceived high-quality. This meant spaces that created healthy habitats for wildlife and tried to offset an increasing risk from floods.

> *"...looking towards keeping healthy rivers. Looking towards encouraging wildlife into that area, native wildlife. Planting hedges. That sort of thing, just whoever is looking after that land, paying attention to the environmental side of things."* User of local spaces

Encouraging Greater Use of Local Green and Natural Spaces

This section explores possible opportunities to encourage greater use of people's local green and natural spaces, drawn from the suggestions of research participants. Not all participants felt there was a need to do more to encourage the use of greenspaces, particularly amongst regular rural users. However, amongst those who felt that more needed to be done to encourage use, suggestions fell into five main categories.

Keeping greenspaces maintained to a high standard. Reflecting the importance placed on well-maintained spaces as an indicator of 'quality', participants emphasised that local spaces needed to feel pleasant to spend time in. This was a key factor in motivating people to use their local greenspaces, by making them as or more appealing than spending time indoors or elsewhere. Participants again referenced the various measures explored in the previous section (such as regular mowing of grass).

Making spaces easier to use all year round. Participants suggested giving more consideration to the surfaces of paths to prevent them from getting excessively muddy or icy during the winter and poor weather, as well as providing sheltered areas and boot brushes for visitors to use. They also suggested making spaces easier and safer to use at dusk or after dark by improving lighting, having longer park and cafe opening hours, activities in the evening, and staff on site.

> *"If they [cafes] were open more often and possibly later into an evening, that might encourage use. [..] I think something else that would negate the weather argument is if there was covered space. [..] that might entice so you can still sit under cover and be looking at the surroundings without the weather getting at you."* Non-user of perceived high-quality spaces

Participants acknowledged, however, that it was not always possible through such measures alone to prevent anti-social behaviour.

Making spaces easier to spend more time in. As well as increasing the frequency of visits, participants identified a need to make local greenspaces easier to spend a longer period of time in. Clean, safe and affordable amenities like toilets and cafes could help facilitate this. Those living in apartments suggested greater consideration could be given to how those without gardens would like to use the space. This included more thoughtful placement of benches and tables (for example, in shaded areas for use in the summer).

> *"To make sure there's enough shaded areas, so especially benches under shaded areas. In the summer I don't want to be sat directly in the sun if I've been walking around a while. I like to sit in the shade. A lot of the benches are right out in the sun."* User of local spaces

Making spaces appealing to a greater variety of user types. Participants, particularly non-users, felt that more needed to be done to make the spaces attractive to a wider variety of individuals with different interests. Ideally, larger spaces should offer different ‘zones’ to meet different preferences (for example, wooded areas, quiet zones, flower gardens as well as open grass).

> *“It's always nice to have a big field or a long walk, but if there's a little playground…or a rose garden or whatever, you can kind of tailor the space to your own needs.”* Non-user of perceived low-quality spaces

Other suggestions included providing facilities for more activities (such as a variety of sports), holding community events (such as farmers’ markets, Christmas markets, craft fairs and music events), outdoor exercise classes (e.g. Pilates), and charity fundraising events, as well as activities for children (for example, scavengers hunts). In contrast, community events could discourage regular users who preferred peaceful, quiet spaces.

As such, consultation with local communities was important to decide whether to hold these types of events and how often.

A related aspect was making it easier for different types of users to enjoy the space at the same time. Participants suggested having dedicated dog parks for dogs to run off the leash, as well as dedicated paths for runners and cyclists (rather than sharing paths with walkers and visitors with young children) would help with this.

Improving education around the use of greenspaces. Participants suggested better education on the benefits of spending time in nature could motivate people to visit the spaces more often. Improved education on the importance of greenspaces could also lead individuals to look after the spaces better and, in turn, reduce levels of anti-social behaviour that discouraged other visitors. More education on individuals' responsibilities to look after a space, the impacts of anti-social behaviour (such as littering, playing music loudly) on others, as well as the potential consequences (such as fines) could have a positive effect on how people behave in the spaces.

Implementing Measures to Encourage Use

Generally, participants felt local authorities or the organisation with responsibility for the space (for example, the Woodland Trust) should ensure spaces are well maintained and deliver upgrades to the spaces. Participants held the view that their taxes should cover these services and that these organisations, rather than community or voluntary organisations, were best placed to deal with any insurance liabilities from safety issues.

They did, however, acknowledge the resource constraints that local authorities are experiencing, placing the poor maintenance of public greenspaces in the context of other public service cuts in recent years. As such, they recognised the need for visitors to take responsibility for looking after the spaces (for example, properly disposing of litter) as well as respecting other users (for example, by adhering to rules about how different areas should be used).

> *"It's the local authority's responsibility to maintain the parks, but […] I understand the financial limitations. […] So I do think we as individuals have a responsibility for improving the green spaces that we want to use."*
> Non-user of perceived low-quality spaces

They also expressed interest in getting involved in community- or charity- organised clean-ups to keep the greenspaces in good condition.

Chapter Summary

Walking was the main activity carried out by frequent and infrequent users of local green and natural spaces. Frequent users displayed an intrinsic appreciation of nature and time spent outdoors. Amongst infrequent and non-users of local spaces were those who preferred other activities, that is, spending time in nature was not in itself a sufficient draw for them. Another group however shared the same interest in the outdoors as regular users but were deterred by what they saw as the low-quality of their local spaces. Among both users and non-users the COVID-19 lockdowns had marked a turning point in their usage – either a substantial increase or decrease in use.

Work and family commitments, bad weather, poor maintenance, and a lack of basic amenities (particularly toilets) were common barriers to use. Participants were also discouraged from using spaces by other visitors, particularly those engaged in anti-social behaviour or using the space for a competing purpose (for example, runners and walkers sharing a path). Users with more than one greenspace nearby balanced considerations of size and proximity in their choice of greenspace, with one or other being prioritised at different times.

While people's expectations of what local spaces should offer (in terms of amenities and activities) varied by the type and location of the spaces, there were five common factors associated with a space being 'high-quality': 1) a space feels safe to visit; 2) a space is visually appealing and well maintained; 3) a space caters to the needs of different visitors; 4) a space is easily accessible; and, 5) a space is environmentally friendly. Local spaces sat along a spectrum of perceived low-to-high quality, with the highest quality spaces displaying all five factors.

Not all participants felt there was a need to do more to encourage the use of local spaces, particularly amongst regular rural users. Among those who did feel more needed to be done, suggestions centred around measures to make spaces *more appealing* and *easier* to spend *more* time in *all year round*. These included measures to make spaces more comfortable to use during poor weather or during dark winter evenings, as well as activities and events to draw new or different users and discourage anti-social behaviour. While participants generally saw local authorities as responsible for these changes and did not feel the general public should have to pay more for this to be done, they also acknowledged the responsibility of individual users in looking after the spaces and respecting other visitors.

Glossary

APaNS

The Adults' People and Nature Surveys (APaNS) for England are long-term social surveys run by Natural England, which measure how people perceive the quality and accessibility of green and nature spaces, how people use them, and how they benefit from them.

Greenspace

There are many definitions of greenspace in use. The definition of greenspace that fits best for the People and Nature Survey is the following: Greenspace is an area of vegetation that is set within a landscape or townscape. Greenspace can include blue space (i.e. lakes, rivers and wetlands), and may include built environment features.

Visits to greenspaces are explained to people responding to the Adults' People and Nature in the following way:

"**The following questions are about free time you have spent outside in green and natural spaces.**

✓ This includes any visits to…

- **green spaces in towns and cities** (e.g. parks, canals)
- **the countryside** (e.g. farmland, woodland, hills and rivers).
- **the coast** (e.g. beaches, cliffs) and activities in the **open sea**

✓ DO include

- visits of any duration (including short trips to the park, dog walking, etc)

X However, DO NOT include…

- time in your garden

- time outside as part of your job

- time spent outside the UK"

IMD

The Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) is the official measure of relative deprivation in England, assessing small areas known as Lower-layer Super Output Areas (LSOAs) (Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government (2018 to 2021), 2019). It ranks areas from the most to the least deprived based on a combination of seven weighted domains: Income, Employment, Health Deprivation and Disability, Education, Crime, Barriers to Housing and Services, and the Living Environment. The IMD is part of the broader Indices of Deprivation (IoD) framework, which captures multiple aspects of deprivation beyond income, reflecting various challenges people may face in their living conditions.

Perceived Quality

Perceived quality in this report combines responses to a set of survey questions about green and natural spaces in people's local area. Specifically, participants were asked to think about green and natural spaces close to where they live and indicate their level of agreement or disagreement with the following statements about whether they are:

- Good places for mental health and wellbeing
- A high enough standard to want to spend time in
- Good places for children to play
- Places that encourage physical health and exercise
- Good places to meet other people
- Provide good opportunities to see nature

References

Ritchie, J. (2013). *Qualitative Research in Practice;.* London: Sage.

Appendix A. Socio-demographic and Individual Characteristics

A set of variables capturing people's socio-demographic and individual characteristics is used in multiple chapters of this report. Specifically, the analysis in chapter one (Which groups have most access to green and natural spaces?), chapter two (Segment composition: characteristics of people with good or bad perceptions of greenspace quality and Secondary characteristics) and additional analysis of patterns of missingness for visit location data (Data quality checks for self-reported visit location).

Details on how these variables were collected are presented in the Table 2 below.

Table 2. Details on the socio-demographic and individual characteristics

Characteristic	Categories	APaNS question
Ethnicity	7 categories: White, Mixed, Asian or Asian British, Black or Black British, Any other ethnic group or background	Q70 (Ethnicity) Which one of the following best describes your ethnic group or background?
Household income	10 categories from £0–14,999 to £150,000 (£0–14,999, £15,000–19,999, £20,000–29,999, £30,000–39,999, £40,000–49,999, £50,000–59,999, £60,000–79,999, £80,000–99,999, £100,000-£149,999, £150,000 +	Q69 (Income) Which of the following best describes your total annual household income before tax?
IMD decile	1–10 scale from most to least deprived	Derived from people's postcodes
Urban/Rural status of the area of residence	2 categories: Urban, Rural	Derived from people's postcodes
Disability status or whether respondent has	4 categories: No health condition, yes, has a health condition - affects day-to-	Derived from the following survey questions:

Characteristic	Categories	APaNS question
a longstanding health condition.	day activities a lot, yes - affects day-to-day activities a little, yes - does not affect day-to-day activities at all	Q74 (Illnesses) Do you have any physical or mental health conditions or illnesses lasting or expected to last for 12 months or more? 1. Yes 2. No Q74b (Illnesses_Impact) Does your condition or illness reduce your ability to carry-out day-to- day activities? 1. Yes, a lot 2. Yes, a little 3. Not at all
Access to a private outdoor space	Flags for access to a private garden, access to a shared garden, access to a private outdoor space – but not a garden, access to an allotment, not access to outdoor space	Q59 (M5_Q1A) Which of the following best applies to you …? Only asked of 40% of people.
Access to a vehicle in the household	2 categories: yes, no.	Derived from Q72 (No_of_Vehicles) In total, how many cars or vans are owned, or available for use, by members of this household? 1. None 2. One 3. Two 4. Three 5. Four or more

Characteristic	Categories	APaNS question
Whether has a dog in the household	2 categories: yes, no.	Q73 (Dog) Do you have a dog in the household?
Age group	5 categories: 16-24, 25-39, 40-54, 55-64, 65+).	Q62 (Age What was your age last birthday? and Q63 (Age_band) In that case, which of these age bands do you fall into?
Qualification levels	3 categories: A university degree (or above), Any other qualifications (e.g. A Levels, O Levels, GCSEs, BTEC, Diplomas, Trade Apprenticeships), No qualifications	Q67 (Qualification) What is your highest level of qualification?
Importance of spending time in nature	3 categories: Disagree (included Completely disagree, Strongly disagree, Disagree), Neither agree nor disagree and Agree (Agree, Strongly agree, Completely agree)	Q49 (M4_Q8) How much do you agree or disagree with the following: d. Spending time in nature is very important to me 1. Completely disagree 2. Strongly disagree 3. Disagree 4. Neither agree nor disagree 5. Agree 6. Strongly agree 7. Completely agree
Employment status	10 categories	Q68 (Work_Status) Are you…? 1. In full-time employment (31+ hours per week) 2. In part-time employment (Up to 30 hours per week) 3. Self-employed

Characteristic	Categories	APaNS question
		4. Unemployed – less than 12 months 5. Unemployed (long term) – more than 12 months 6. Not working – retired 7. Not working – looking after house/children/other caring responsibilities 8. Not working – long term sick or disabled 9. Student – in full-time education 10. Student – in part-time education

Note on the Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD)

The Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) is the official measure of relative deprivation in England, assessing small areas known as Lower-layer Super Output Areas (LSOAs) (Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government (2018 to 2021), 2019). It ranks areas from the most to the least deprived based on a combination of seven weighted domains: Income, Employment, Health Deprivation and Disability, Education, Crime, Barriers to Housing and Services, and the Living Environment. The IMD is part of the broader Indices of Deprivation (IoD) framework, which captures multiple aspects of deprivation beyond income, reflecting various challenges people may face in their living conditions.

Appendix B. Time Series Analysis

Time Series Analyses: Perceptions of Greenspace Access and Greenspace Use Over Time

Objective

Two separate time series analyses were conducted to examine trends in greenspace access perception and use to provide greater detail for findings of chapters one and two. The first analysis explored whether people's perceptions of having a greenspace "within easy walking distance" changed over time or exhibited seasonal patterns. The second analysis examined trends in greenspace visits, investigating both long-term shifts and seasonal fluctuations in the proportion of the population that reported visiting any greenspace in the last 14 days.

Methodology

For both analyses, responses were aggregated monthly to capture patterns over time while smoothing out short-term fluctuations. An ARIMA (Auto-Regressive Integrated Moving Average) model was applied to decompose the time series into:

- **Trend:** Long-term shifts, such as gradual increases or decreases.
- **Seasonality:** Recurring patterns tied to specific times of the year.
- **Residuals:** Unexplained random variations.

Findings

1. Perceptions of Greenspace Access: Stable Over Time

- The analysis showed no significant upward or downward trend in the proportion of people agreeing that greenspaces are within easy walking distance. Perceptions of access remained stable throughout the study period (Figure 44).
- There was minimal seasonality in reported access. Agreement rates remained relatively consistent across months, with no clear evidence of recurring peaks or dips at specific times of the year (Figure 44).

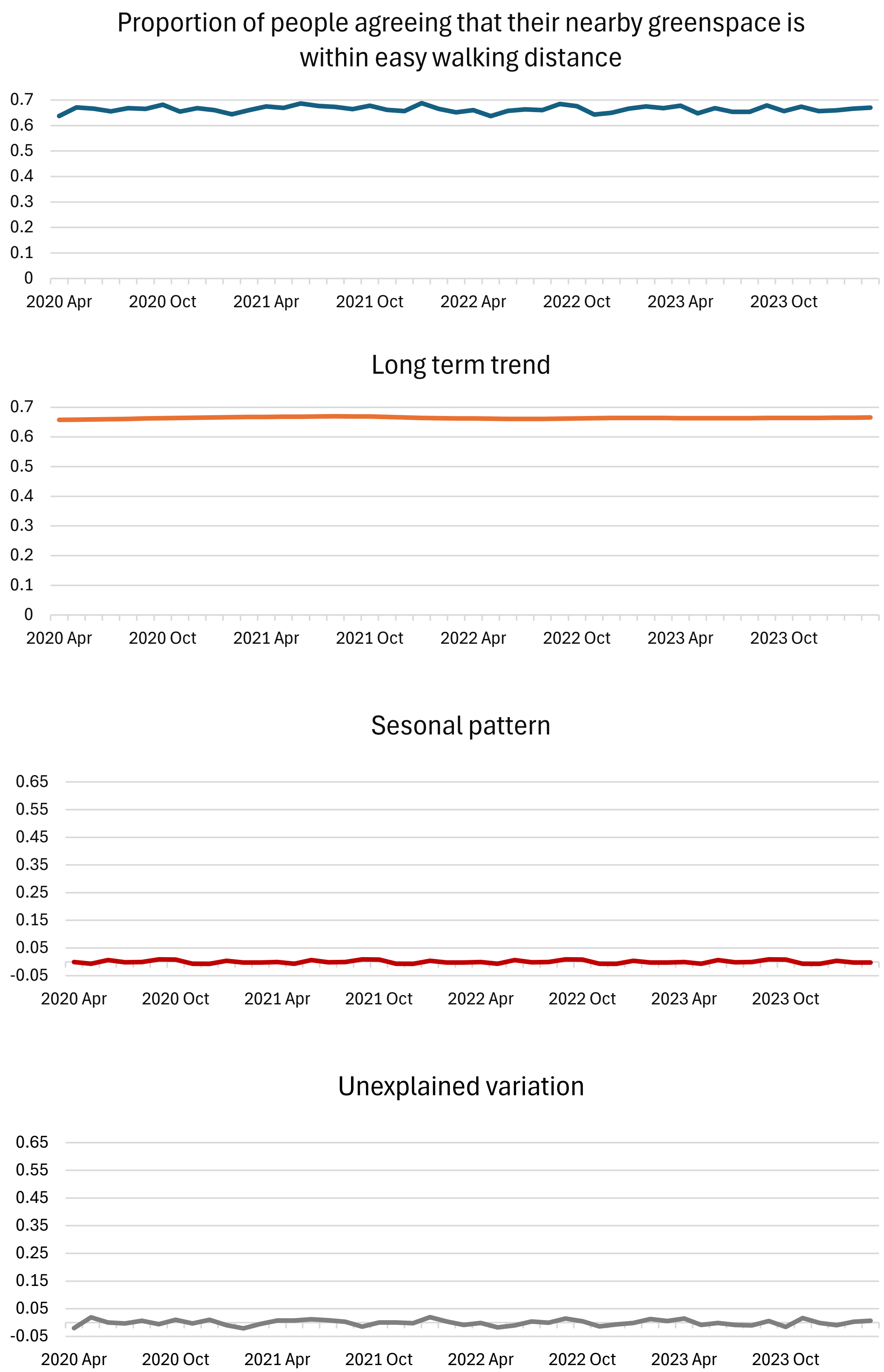
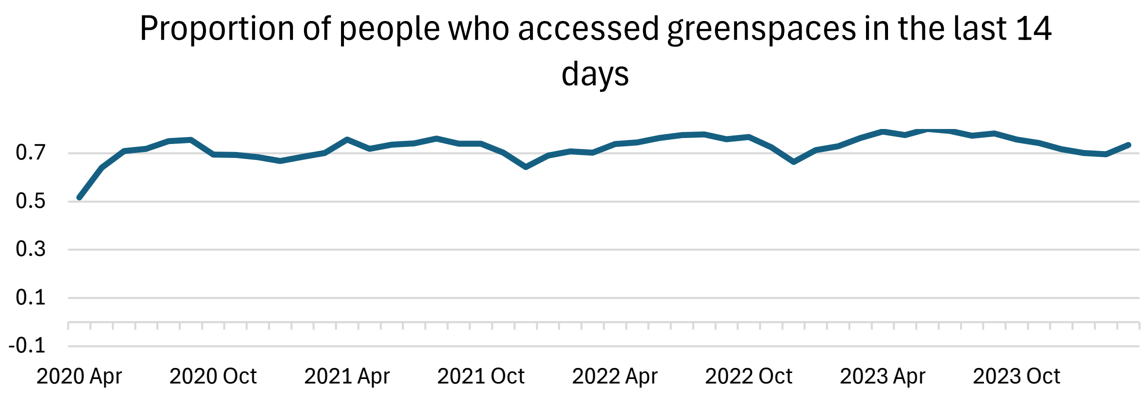


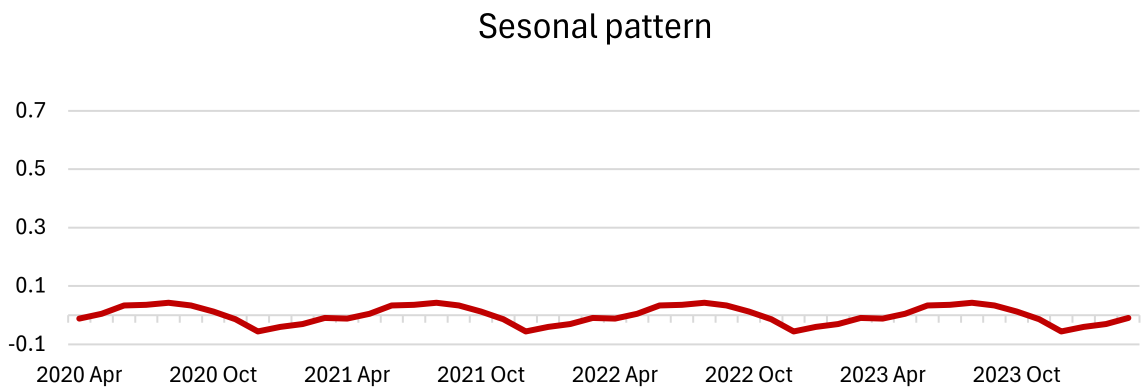
Figure 44: Time series decomposition of the proportion of population agreeing that local green and natural spaces are within easy walking distance (%). This figure illustrates the

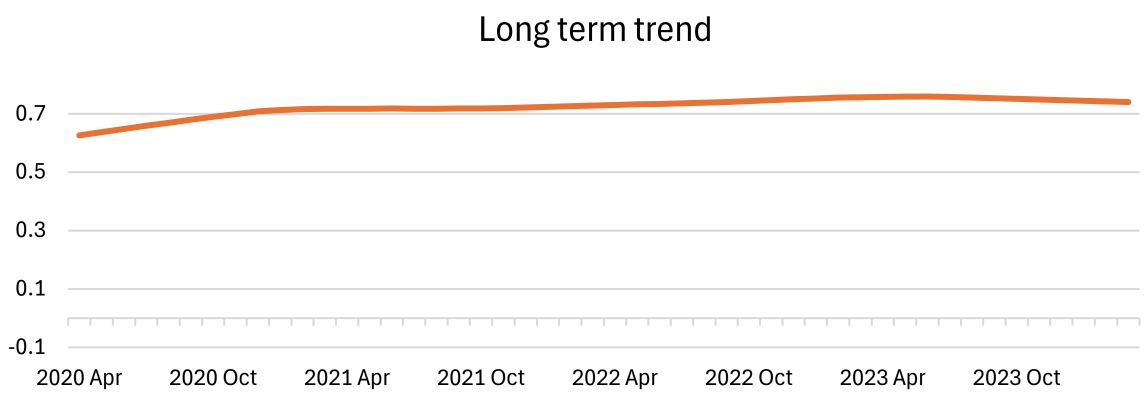
raw data ("Proportion Agreeing that Nearby Greenspace Easy Walk"), seasonal pattern, long-term trend, and unexplained variation (that is, variation not explained by seasonal patterns or long-term trend).

2. Trends in Greenspace Use: Seasonal and Long-Term Patterns

- Unlike perceptions of access, greenspace use exhibited both a slight upward trend and notable seasonal variation.
- Upward Trend: Over the course of the study period (from May 2020 to the end of the survey period), there was a gradual increase in the proportion of the population reporting that they had visited a greenspace in the last 14 days (Figure 45).
- Seasonal Patterns: Greenspace use was higher in summer and lower in winter. The lowest usage was observed in December, which on average was about 10% lower than in August, the peak month for greenspace visits (Figure 45).







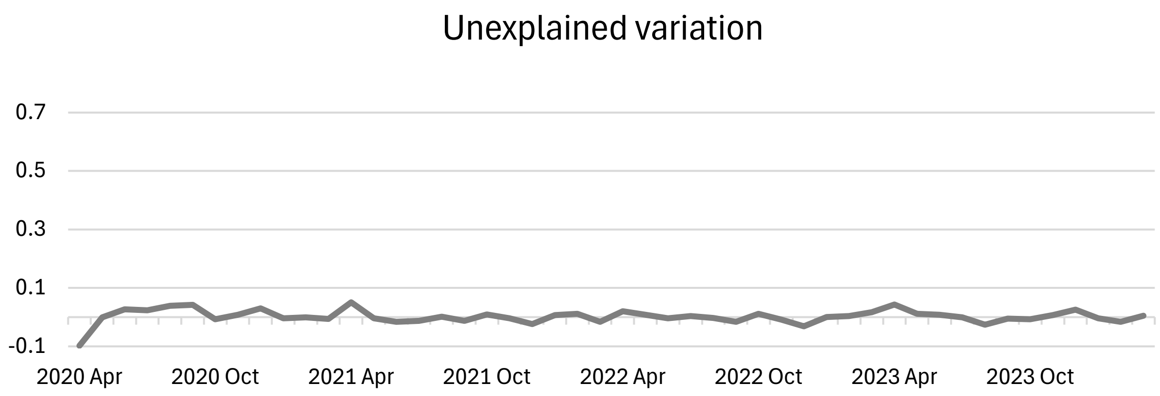


Figure 45: Time series decomposition of the proportion of population reporting a visit to green in natural space in the last 14 days (%). This figure illustrates the raw data ("Proportion Accessing Greenspace in Last 14 Days"), seasonal pattern, long-term trend, and unexplained variation (that is, variation not explained by seasonal patterns or long-term trend).

Key Takeaways

- **Stable Perceptions of Access:** People's perceptions of greenspace proximity appear consistent over time and do not seem to be influenced by seasonal changes or external factors.
- **Increasing Greenspace Use:** While perceptions of access remained steady, greenspace visits showed a gradual upward trend, suggesting increasing engagement with greenspaces over time.
- **Seasonal Variation in Use:** Greenspace visits peak in summer and dip in winter, with December consistently showing the lowest usage levels. This suggests that while greenspaces are used year-round, seasonal factors like weather and daylight hours play a role in shaping visitation patterns.

These findings provide a more nuanced understanding of greenspace engagement, highlighting both stable perceptions of access and evolving patterns of use.

Appendix C. Distance Data Quality

Data Quality Checks for Self-Reported Visit Location

To understand how people's use of green and natural spaces varies by distance travelled, the analysis relied on location data from Google Maps. To ensure the accuracy of this data, an additional validation process was conducted, comparing it against an alternative measure of travel distance recorded in the survey.

Specifically, the survey captured two different measures of the distance people travelled to reach a green or natural space:

- **Survey question**: respondents reported how far they travelled (specifically, they were asked "approximately how far in miles did you travel to reach this place" (M2A_Q6)). This was a categorical variable that grouped visits into five groups based on the distance people travelled to the visit's location: less than 1 mile, 1-2 miles, 3-10 miles, 11-50 miles and more than 50 miles.
- **Derived distance variable**: respondents provided the location of the place visited using a Google maps plug-in. For visits that started at home the distance from the location of the visit to people's home postcode was calculated in miles (measured in a straight line between the two points). This was a continuous variable that recorded the distance people travelled to the visit's location from their homes.

To assess the accuracy of visit location data from the maps plug-in, distance estimates from the plug-in were compared with responses to the survey question on travel distance. A categorical variable was created from the continuous distance data to match the survey response categories, and the two were cross-tabulated (Table 3).

The distance variable derived from the location data was reliable for identifying visits that were very close or very distant but was less consistent with self-reported survey data for intermediate distances. For example, most visits classified as "less than 1 mile" (73%) or "more than 50 miles" (72%) in the geo-data matched the corresponding survey categories. In contrast, only 55% of visits in the "11-50 miles" category aligned with the survey data, with match rates dropping below 50% for the "1-2 miles" and "3-10 miles" categories.

Overall, the Google plug-in provided reliable measures for very close or very distant visits but was less consistent with the self-reported data for intermediate distances.

Table 3: Cross tabulation for distance variable derived from the location data and survey question on the distance travelled to visit green and natural spaces (%)

Approximately how far in miles did you travel to reach this place (M2A_Q6)?	Less than 1 mile	1-2 miles	3-10 miles	11-50 miles	More than 50 miles
Less than 1 mile	73	13	5	4	4
1-2 miles	38	36	11	7	9
3-10 miles	11	24	41	11	13
11-50 miles	2	2	22	55	18
More than 50 miles	1	1	2	24	72
Sample	18,464	8,708	6,958	4,934	4,395

Table notes

1. Base: Adults in England with visits to greenspaces in the last 14 days.
2. The categories for the distance variable were derived from the location data.
3. Source: APaNS, April 2020 - March 2024.

Some respondents reported a visit but did not specify the location, meaning their data could not be included in certain analyses. As a result, some groups are underrepresented in the findings. A regression analysis was conducted to identify such groups. Missing location data was more common among certain socio-demographic groups. Specifically, the data was more likely to be missing for people with a health condition that significantly affects their daily activities compared with people without a health condition. There were also differences found by employment status. Compared to people in full time employment the following groups were all *less* likely to have missing distance data: those who were self-employed, looking after the home, children or had other caring responsibilities, were long-term sick or disabled.

This can be seen in Table 4 and Table 5 on the following pages. Despite this limitation, the data still offer valuable insights into how people use greenspaces.

Table 4: Proportion of the population with missing location data by disability (% [upper CI; lower CI])

	No health condition	Has a health condition - does not affect day-to-day activities at all	Has a health condition - affects day-to-day activities a little	Has a health condition - affects day-to-day activities a lot
Valid location data	81 [81-82]	85 [84-87]	84 [83-85]	76 [74-77]
Missing location data	19 [18-19]	15 [13-16]	16 [15-17]	24 [23-26]
Sample	37,974	2,633	7,869	4,063

Table notes

1. Base: Adults in England with visits to greenspaces in the last 14 days.
2. Source: APaNS, April 2020 - March 2024.

Table 5: Proportion of the population with missing location data by Work Status (% [upper CI; lower CI])

	In employment (full and part time)	Self-employed	Unemployed – less than 12 months	Unemployed (long term) – more than 12 months	Not working – retired	Not working – looking after house / children / other caring responsibilities	Not working – long term sick or disabled	Student
Valid location data	81 [80-81]	81 [80-83]	76 [72-79]	81 [78-83]	87 [86-88]	83 [81-84]	87 [86-89]	67 [64-69]
Missing location data	19 [19-20]	19 [17-20]	24 [21-28]	19 [17-22]	13 [12-14]	17 [16-19]	13 [11-14]	33 [31-36]
Sample	32,215	3,111	1,029	1,258	13,377	2,956	1,900	2,723

Table notes

1. Base: Adults in England who visited a greenspace in the last 14 days.
2. Source: APaNS, April 2020 - March 2024.

Distance Travelled to Visit Green Spaces

In the main body of the report we have focussed on comparing visits made over distances within 1km and to those made to green spaces over 1km away, however, for completeness we have presented a set of more detailed findings in this appendix which compared visits made over very short distances (within 300m) to those over intermediate distances of between 300m and 1km.

In contrast to the results presented in the main body of the report this analysis showed minimal difference in how people spent their time during these visits. The proportions of visits involving specific activities differs by only 2–3%, as shown in Figure 6.

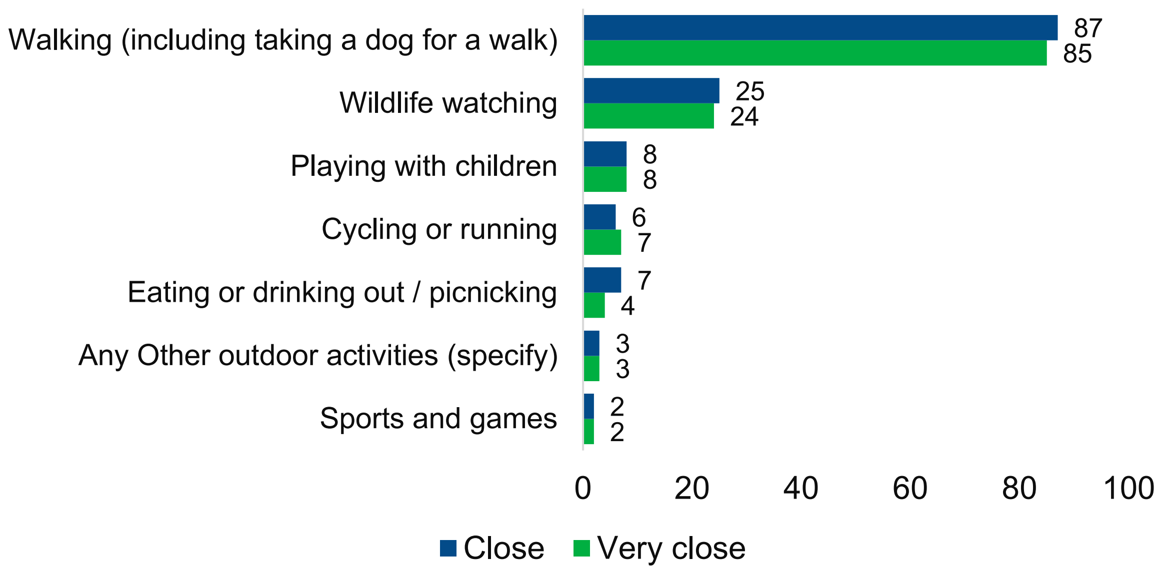


Figure 46: Proportion of visits that including specific activities by proximity of the greenspace

Chart notes

1. Source: M2A_Q8A. Which of these activities, if any, did you do on this specific visit?
2. Data collected between April 2020 and March 2024.
3. Close – 301m to 1km; Very Close – up to 300m
4. The samples for this variable were Close (11,077), Very close (4,431).
5. All adults in England who had visited a greenspace in the last 14 days.
6. Only activities mentioned in more than one percent of visits are included in the chart.

Appendix D. Qualitative Methodology

Sampling and Recruitment

A total of 21 participants took part across three focus groups (7 per group). A purposive sampling approach was used to ensure the research included breadth and diversity of views and experiences on use of local green and natural spaces. To allow the research to explore the barriers and enablers to the use of local spaces, the sample included only those with at least one green or natural space within 1km or a 15-minute walk of their home. A key objective of the qualitative research was to understand how policy might encourage people to use their spaces more often. Given this, the following were excluded from the research:

- Those who used their local spaces every day
- Those who used the spaces mainly for dog walking

The sample design was based around two primary criteria of particular salience to the research objectives: frequency of use, and whether spaces were perceived as high- or low-quality. Table 2 provides a detailed breakdown of the sample design.

Table 6: Focus group sample design

Focus group no.	
1	Frequent users of perceived high- or low- quality spaces
2	Infrequent/ non-users of perceived high-quality spaces
3	Infrequent/ non-users of perceived low-quality spaces

Frequent users were those who used their local spaces at least a few times per month. Infrequent- or non-users used their local spaces at most a few times each year. Views on two dimensions from the People and Nature survey were used to determine perceived quality:

- The green/ blue spaces 15 minutes from my house are of a high enough standard to want to spend time in
- The green/blue spaces 15 minutes from my house provide good opportunities to see nature

We also monitored for a range of secondary criteria, including age, gender, ethnicity and location (i.e., urban, suburban, rural) to ensure the sample included participants with a range of characteristics. Full details on the sample recruited are provided in Appendix E.

Participants were recruited using a trusted recruitment agency, Criteria Fieldwork. A screening questionnaire was used to determine eligibility.

Fieldwork

All three focus groups were carried out remotely via Zoom between mid-December 2024 and early-January 2025. Each focus group lasted approximately 90 minutes.

Topic guides, designed in collaboration with Natural England, were used to facilitate the three focus groups. Two topic guides were used (see Appendix F), one for users of local green and natural spaces and one for infrequent/ non-users. The topic guides were designed to allow flexibility in discussions, while ensuring core themes were addressed. All participants received a £50 incentive as a thank you for taking part.

Data management and analysis

All focus groups were audio recorded with participants' permission and then transcribed verbatim. The transcripts were managed and analysed using NatCen's Framework approach for qualitative data analysis (Ritchie, 2013). The analytical framework is developed based on the key topics and issues emerging from the research objectives and data. A series of matrices are then set-up, each relating to a different thematic issue. The columns in each matrix represent the key sub-themes or topics and the rows represent each focus group. Data from each focus group was then summarised into the appropriate cell so the data are ordered systematically and grounded in participants' accounts. Following this, thematic analysis was conducted to draw out all the themes emerging on each research objective, followed by interpretative analysis to seek explanations to higher levels of abstraction.

Appendix E. Qualitative Sample Composition

Table 7 Focus group sample composition

Sample criteria	Characteristics	Number achieved
Usage of local spaces	Frequent users	7
Usage of local spaces	In-frequent or non-users	14
Quality of local space	High-quality	14
Quality of local space	Low-quality	7
Gender	Male	9
Gender	Female	12
Age	18-34	6
Age	35-49	8
Age	50+	7
Ethnicity	White	16
Ethnicity	Ethnic Minority	5
Long-term health	Yes	8
Long-term health	No	13
Type of area	Urban	8
Type of area	Suburban	7
Type of area	Rural / semi-rural	6
Total		21

Appendix F. Focus Group Topic Guides

Focus Group With Users

Researcher introduction

- **Introduction to NatCen facilitator and co-facilitator**
- **Introduction to NatCen:** We are an independent, not-for-profit research organisation. Natural England has commissioned NatCen to carry out this research.
- **Explanation of research**:

  – The aim of the study is to better understand how people use green and natural spaces in their local area. Natural England is interested in learning more about:

  - What factors influence people's use of local green and natural spaces
  - What prevents people from making greater use of these spaces

  – By taking part, you will help inform Natural England's policies, to increase access to and use of green and natural spaces near people's homes.

- **Ethical reassurances and caveats**.

  – **Participation is voluntary** – You do not have to take part and can leave the focus group at any time without giving a reason. You do not have to answer any questions you do not want to.

  – **Confidentiality** – What you say will be treated confidentially, we will write a report about the findings of the research, but it will not include any names of individual participants. You will not be identifiable to anyone else in the report.

  – **Anonymity** – NatCen will not pass any details to Natural England or anyone else about anyone who has taken part in the research.

- About the discussion:

  – **Duration** – The group will last around 90 minutes. We will have a short 5-minute break halfway through, but feel free to pause or step away at any time if you need to.

  – **Ground rules for group discussion**.

  - **Respecting different views**: There will be a wide variety of views and experiences within the group today. Remind participants that what they share today may have an impact on others and it is important we hear all their views, even if they differ.
  - **Speak one at a time** – for the recording

- **Switch mobiles off** – or put them on silent if you need to be contactable
- **Leave your mics on** - including your cameras, if you feel comfortable. If it gets too noisy, we will tell you. Please only use the chat function if you are having technical difficulties. The NatCen researcher will be able to help you with this.

– **There are no wrong or right answers.** We simply want to understand your views and experiences and so we may ask what may seem like obvious questions.

– **Recording:** With your permission, we will be recording the group, so we have an accurate record of what is said. Files are stored securely in line with data protection laws and only the research team will have access to the recordings. The recordings will be deleted at the end of the project.

- Thank you: After the focus group you will be sent £50 as a thank you for taking part.
- Questions and permission to start recording

Introductions and icebreaker

- Ask each participant to introduce themselves in turn, confirm consent to take part and share one way they like to spend time outdoors.
- For the remainder of the discussion, we will be referring to green and natural spaces near your homes i.e., within a 15-minute walk or 1km of their home. This includes:
  - greenspaces in towns and cities (e.g. parks, canals)
  - the countryside (e.g. farmland, woodland, hills and rivers)
  - the coast (e.g. beaches, cliffs) and activities in the open sea
- Excludes: time in your garden

Usage of local greenspaces

Key RQ 1: Understand how and why people use green and natural spaces near their homes

- **Usage of greenspaces near their homes**
  - Reasons for using greenspaces
  - Types of greenspaces e.g., park, canal, woodlands
  - Frequency of usage of greenspace
    - If one is used more than another
    - Whether varies throughout the year (if so, why)
  - Types of activities in the greenspace e.g., walking, picnicking, exercising

– Who they visit with (e.g. alone, with family, with friends)

- **Benefits they experience using the greenspace near their home (e.g. social, physical, other wellbeing)**

  – How this compares to other local spaces e.g., library, gym, shopping centre

Factors affecting usage

Key RQ 2: Identify factors influencing the use of greenspaces

Facilitator: Ask participants to reflect on experiences of using greenspaces near their homes

- **What they particularly like/ are attracted to about these spaces**

  Facilitator: Allow spontaneous response, then prompt on:

  – Specific features/ aspects they particularly like / are attracted to e.g., proximity to home, size, cleanliness, layout, accessibility (such as parking or paths)

  – Specific facilities they like / are attracted to e.g., playgrounds, trails, seating, toilets, food and drink, activities offered

  Probe for specific examples

- **If use one space more than others, reasons for this**

- **What, if anything, they don't like/ discourages them from using the spaces**

Facilitator: Allow spontaneous response, then prompt on:

  – Specific features/ aspects that discourage them from using the greenspaces e.g., safety, accessibility, cleanliness, lighting, lack of facilities

  – Weather or seasonal changes

  – Anything else

- **Whether presence of other people/ visitors affects usage (how and why)**

Perception of greenspace quality

Key RQ 3: Explore how people determine the quality of greenspaces.

Facilitator: Explain that Natural England are interested in better understanding what people consider to be a 'high quality' green or natural space. This is a space that functions well and meets people's needs.

- **How they would describe a 'high-quality greenspace'**

  – most important features or qualities

- **What are their expectations for local greenspaces**

Facilitator: Allow spontaneous response, then prompt on

- – Size and condition of the space
- – Facilities offered
- – Activities/ uses of the space
- – Benefits from spending time there

- **Features or qualities that make a greenspace feel not 'high-quality'**

Encouraging greater use of greenspaces

Key RQ 3: Identify improvements or changes that would motivate people to use greenspaces more frequently.

Facilitator: Explain that Natural England is interested in better understanding what could encourage people to spend more time in their local green and natural spaces.

- **What would encourage them to make greater use of their local greenspaces**

  Facilitator: Allow spontaneous response, then prompt on: [*DRAW ON BARRIERS RAISED IN SECTION 3]*

  – Amenities and facilities e.g., playgrounds, trails, seating, toilets, food and drink, sports, clubs

  – Activities and events e.g., outdoor classes, clean-up, group hikes

  – Accessibility e.g., paths, signage

  – Conditions of the space e.g., lighting, cleanliness

  For each suggestion offered, probe

  - – What would it involve
  - – Reasons behind it
  - – Who should do it (e.g. local council, community-driven, someone else)
  - – The difference it would make

Close

- Ask for any final reflections or suggestions for Natural England
- Thank participants for taking part and sharing their views.
- Reiterate confidentiality and anonymity and how the research will be used.
- Ask them if they have any questions

- Explain next steps: Focus group will be transcribed and analysed. Findings will be written into a report.
- Explain arrangements for incentive.
- If they have further questions, they can contact us on [project email]

Focus Group With Infrequent and Non-Users

Researcher introduction

- **Introduction to NatCen facilitator and co-facilitator**
- **Introduction to NatCen:** We are an independent, not-for-profit research organisation. Natural England has commissioned NatCen to carry out this research.
- **Explanation of research**:

  – The aim of the study is to better understand how people use green and natural spaces in their local area. Natural England is interested in learning more about:

  - What factors influence people's use of local green and natural spaces
  - What prevents people from making greater use of these spaces
  - By taking part, you will help inform Natural England and the Department for the Environment, Food and Rural Affair (Defra)'s policies, to increase access to and use of green and natural spaces near people's homes.

- **Ethical reassurances and caveats.**

  – **Participation is voluntary** – You do not have to take part and can leave the focus group at any time without giving a reason. You do not have to answer any questions you do not want to.

  – **Confidentiality** – What you say will be treated confidentially, we will write a report about the findings of the research, but it will not include any names of individual participants. You will not be identifiable to anyone else in the report.

  – **Anonymity** – NatCen will not pass any details to DfT or anyone else about anyone who has taken part in the research.

- About the discussion:

  – **Duration** – The group will last around 90 minutes. We will have a short 5-minute break just over halfway through, but feel free to pause or step away at any time if you need to.

  – **Ground rules for group discussion**.

  - **Respecting different views**: There will be a wide variety of views and experiences within the group today. Remind participants that what they share today may have an impact on others and it is important we hear all their views, even if they differ.
  - **Speak one at a time** – for the recording
  - **Switch mobiles off** – or put them on silent if you need to be contactable

- **Leave your mics on** - including your cameras, if you feel comfortable. If it gets too noisy, we will tell you. Please only use the chat function if you are having technical difficulties. The NatCen researcher will be able to help you with this.

– **There are no wrong or right answers.** We simply want to understand your views and experiences and so we may ask what may seem like obvious questions.

– **Recording:** With your permission, we will be recording the group, so we have an accurate record of what is said. Files are stored securely in line with data protection laws and only the research team will have access to the recordings. The recordings will be deleted at the end of the project.

- Thank you: After the focus group you will be sent £50 as a thank you for taking part.
- Questions and permission to start recording

Introductions and icebreaker

- Ask each participant to introduce themselves in turn, confirm consent and share one activity they enjoy doing.
- For the remainder of the discussion, we will be referring to green and natural spaces near your homes i.e., within a 15-minute walk or 1km of their home. This includes:
  - greenspaces in towns and cities (e.g. parks, canals)
  - the countryside (e.g. farmland, woodland, hills and rivers)
  - the coast (e.g. beaches, cliffs) and activities in the open sea
- Excludes: time in your garden

Usage of local greenspaces

Key RQ 1: Understand how and why people use or do not use greenspaces near their homes

Facilitator: Explain that we would first like to hear about the types of greenspaces that they have near their homes

- **Types of greenspaces near their homes** e.g., park, canal, woodlands
- **Non-usage of greenspaces near their homes**
  - Whether visit/ use these spaces, if at all
  - Reasons for not using these spaces more frequently e.g. condition of the space, weather, health / mobility, lack of interest, other spaces preferred, etc.
  - Whether used previously
    - If so, reason for change

– Whether would like to use the spaces more

– If so, why

- **Whether make use of other local spaces** e.g., library, gym, shopping centres

– How these spaces compare to their local greenspaces e.g. activities available, facilities, accessibility, safety

- **Whether use other greenspaces further away from their homes**

– What types

– Frequency of usage

– Types of activities they do there e.g., walking, picnicking, exercising

– Why these spaces are preferred over local greenspaces

Factors affecting usage

Key RQ 2: Identify factors influencing the use of greenspaces

Facilitator: Ask participants to reflect on experiences or views of greenspaces near their homes

- **What they don't like about/ discourages them from using the spaces**

Facilitator: Allow spontaneous response, then prompt on

– Specific features/ aspects that discourage them from using the greenspaces e.g., safety, accessibility, cleanliness, lighting, lack of facilities

Probe for specific examples

– Aside from the space itself, any other barriers to using the spaces (e.g. health, sense of belonging in the spaces, lack of interest, no one to go with, etc)

– Weather or seasonal changes

– Anything else

- **What, if anything, they like/ are attracted to about these spaces**

Facilitator: Allow spontaneous response, then prompt on:

– Specific features/ aspects they particularly like / are attracted to e.g., proximity to home, size, cleanliness, layout, accessibility (such as parking or paths)

– Specific facilities they like / are attracted to e.g., playgrounds, trails, seating, toilets, food and drink, activities offered

Probe for specific examples

- How this compares to other local spaces or other greenspaces where they spend time (as discussed earlier)

- **Whether presence of other people/ visitors affects usage (how and why)**

Perception of greenspace quality

Key RQ 3: Explore how people determine the quality of greenspaces.

Facilitator: Explain that Natural England are interested in better understanding what people consider to be a 'high quality' green or natural space. This is a space that functions well and meets people's needs.

- **How they would describe a 'high-quality greenspace'**
  - most important features or qualities
- **What are their expectations for local greenspaces**

  Facilitator: Allow spontaneous response, then prompt on

  - Size and condition of the space
  - Facilities offered
  - Activities/ uses of the space
  - Benefits from spending time there
- **Features or qualities that make a greenspace feel not 'high-quality'**

Encouraging greater use of greenspaces

Key RQ 3: Identify improvements or changes that would motivate people to use greenspaces more frequently.

Facilitator: Explain that Natural England is interested in better understanding what could encourage people to spend more time in their local green and natural spaces.

- **What, if anything, would encourage or enable them to make greater use of their local greenspaces**

  Facilitator: Allow spontaneous response, then prompt on: [*DRAW ON REASONS FOR NON-USE IN SECTION 2 AND BARRIERS RAISED IN SECTION 3]*

  Facilitator: if participants are not offering suggestions different to those discussed under section 4, explain that we are interested in hearing what would encourage use beyond changes to the physical space

  - Amenities and facilities e.g., playgrounds, trails, seating, toilets, food and drink, sports, clubs
  - Activities and events e.g., outdoor classes, clean-up, group hikes

– Accessibility e.g., paths, signage
– Conditions of the space e.g., lighting, cleanliness

For each suggestion offered, probe

- What would it involve
- Reasons behind it
- Who should do it (e.g. local council, community-driven, someone else)
- The difference it would make

Close

- Summary of the main points shared during the discussion.
- Thank participants for taking part and sharing their views.
- Reiterate confidentiality and anonymity and how the research will be used.
- Ask them if they have any questions
- Explain next steps: Focus group will be transcribed and analysed. Findings will be written into a report.
- Explain that we will send them their thank you voucher by email within the next week. Check where this should be sent.
- If they have further questions, they can contact us on [project email]

Appendix G. Latent Class Analysis Technical Details

This appendix provides a summary of some additional technical details around the Latent Class Analysis presented in chapter 2.

Table 8 summarises the fit of the different potential models we considered in this analysis, with between 1 and 10 classes. These results show that the fit of these models continues to improve as each additional class is added, however, after the fourth class is added the improvement in BIC and ssaBIC values is minimal and the interpretation of the classes added becomes difficult. Given this a fourth-class solution was adopted.

Following that Table 9 presents two diagnostic statistics for each of the different models considered, which measure how accurately people are assigned to their classes. The four-class model has a fairly high value on both of these, indicating we can be confident in which class people are assigned to. This is particularly important in this case, where we have assigned people to the class they are most likely to belong to and used the resulting variable in follow-up analysis.

Table 8. Latent Class Model Fit Statistics

Number of classes in the model	Bayesian Information Criterion (BIC)	sample-size Adjusted BIC	Bayes Factor	Adjusted LMR p-value
1	1,501,950.8	1,501,874.5		
2	1,314,584.4	1,314,428.7	<3	P < 0.001
3	1,188,397.3	1,188,162.1	<3	P < 0.001
4	1,126,917.2	1,126,602.5	<3	P < 0.001
5	1,107,128.9	1,106,734.8	<3	P < 0.001
6	1,091,651.5	1,091,178.0	<3	P < 0.001
7	1,083,443.8	1,082,890.8	<3	P < 0.001
8	1,078,579.6	1,077,947.1	<3	P < 0.001
9	1,075,926.8	1,075,214.9	<3	P < 0.001

10	1,073,762.5	1,072,971.1	<3	P < 0.001

Table 9. Latent Class Model Diagnostic Statistics

Number of classes in the model	Relative entropy	Average latent class posterior probability
1		1.000
2	0.888	0.971
3	0.910	0.957
4	0.885	0.937
5	0.877	0.924
6	0.836	0.889
7	0.826	0.870
8	0.831	0.867
9	0.814	0.845
10	0.792	0.822

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