

Scottish Parliament Local Government and Communities Committee

Access to Green Space



Fields in Trust

Fields in Trust champions and supports our parks and green spaces by protecting them for people to enjoy in perpetuity. Because once lost, they are lost forever. Parks and green spaces in Scotland and across the UK are under threat and it is up to all of us to stem this cycle of disappearance and decline. We believe that everyone, irrespective of who they are and where they live should have the right to enjoy and benefit from local parks and green spaces; places where we can all move, breathe, run and play. Parks and green spaces are proven to help people stay physically and mentally well and are an important tool to drive social cohesion, combat loneliness and build community spirit.

Fields in Trust is an independent charity with over 90 years' experience protecting parks and green spaces. In Scotland we work with local authorities, green space landowners and other partners to champion the value of our parks and green spaces to achieve better protection for their future at both local and national level. To date 273 parks and green spaces are protected in Scotland making a total of 2,735 spaces UK-wide.

The Health and Wellbeing Benefits of Parks and Green Spaces

It is the view of Fields in Trust that few public services have such a wide-ranging, positive impact on local communities as parks and green spaces on which to play. Unfortunately, such spaces tend to be valued within local budgets according to their maintenance costs rather than their true dividend to local communities which vastly exceeds such sums because of their multiple benefits.

Fields in Trust has just published new research '**Revaluing Parks and Green Spaces: Measuring their economic and wellbeing value to individuals**' using a UK-wide representative sample of over 4,000 adult residents.

- Parks and Green Spaces contribute **£2.8 Billion per year** to Scotland's community health and wellbeing
- The average Total Economic Value to an individual in Scotland is **£27.96 per year**
- Using parks and green spaces equates to better general health which translates into a **£9.1million** saving to NHS Scotland per year because of fewer GP visits

Parks and green spaces can:

- Contribute to a preventative health agenda
- Reduce future Exchequer expenditure
- Reduce health inequalities
- Increase social cohesion and equality

As well as contributing to Scottish Government Outcomes including:

- Healthy and active lives
- Inclusive communities
- Protect and enhance our environment

As publicly owned assets parks and green spaces have something to offer all sections of the community from pre-school children through to retired adults. We now have a growing body of empirical evidence which confirms that they provide direct benefits to those who use them and, importantly, indirectly to those who don't. An active life is essential for physical and mental health and wellbeingⁱ and that access to local green spaces has a positive impact on health by encouraging people to be active every day. Evidence suggests that physical and mental health can be improved with greater access to green spaceⁱⁱ and green and natural environments have the potential to reduce health inequalitiesⁱⁱⁱ.

A World Health Organisation report^{iv} evaluated the effects of green spaces on physical activity and their potential to reduce public health inequalities. It stated that "... access to public open space and green areas with appropriate recreation facilities for all age groups is needed to support active recreation". The provision of sufficient outdoor recreational spaces and green spaces will play an important role in helping public bodies achieve several health objectives.

In 2016, 65% of adults aged 16 and over were overweight, including 29% who were obese, and the proportion of children at risk of overweight (including obesity) was 29%^v. Daily physical activity supported by parents and carers outside of school time is recommended and in Scotland the community-led *Daily Mile* campaign^{vi} in schools and workplaces has been endorsed and supported by Scottish Parliament. The Institute of Health Equality^{vii}, 2014 found that older people live longer in areas where there is more green space close to their homes; children who live close to green spaces have higher levels of physical activity and are less likely to experience an increase in BMI over time and people living in the most deprived areas are ten times less likely to live in the greenest areas.

The Scottish Parliament recognises that green space has substantial environmental and health impacts, but also links to other aspects, such as community cohesion, social connectedness and community resilience, and has set an aim to "Improve access to local green space" in response to findings that in Scotland, people living in the most deprived areas are less likely to live within a five-minute walk of their nearest green space than people in less deprived areas^{viii}. Parks and green spaces improve community cohesion by offering shared spaces for community connections and to tackle social isolation (Cohen-Cline et al., 2015; Hartig et al., 2014; White et al., 2013). *The Marmot Review, 2010*^x recommends that improving the availability of good quality green spaces across the social gradient will help reduce health inequalities.

However, despite the evidence of the benefits of parks and green spaces and the policy demand for these benefits, funding cuts and skills shortages have led to a significant decline in the quality of parks in recent decades^x.

Revaluing Parks

Parks and green spaces are typically free at the point of access and this access is usually unregulated; spaces where people can move, breathe, play and run. However, these fundamental benefits historically made it difficult to quantify their impact in monetary terms, a crucial element of making a compelling business case to local authorities to support the ongoing funding and existence of parks and green spaces.

Fields in Trust's new research provides a robust economic valuation of parks and green spaces in the UK as well as valuing improvements in health and wellbeing associated with their frequent use. Using HM Treasury approved best practice for valuing non-market goods this is the first time a research study on parks and green spaces has used welfare weighting methodology, allowing for more informed evidence-based policy decisions.

Our results show the Wellbeing Value associated with the frequent use of local parks and green spaces is worth an annual £2.8 billion to the Scottish population (the equivalent of £974 per individual, per year). This data, based on measurements of life satisfaction, quantifies the significant physical and mental health and wellbeing benefits that individuals derive from regular use of local parks and green spaces.

The average Total Economic Value to an individual in Scotland (capturing benefits gained from using local parks as well as their preservation for future generations) is £27.96 per year. A significant finding of this research is the clear demonstration that when welfare weighting is applied, lower socio-economic groups and Black, Asian, Minority Ethnic (BAME) groups ascribe a much higher relative value to parks and green spaces than the national average. Lower socio-economic groups report a welfare weighted value of £51.84 per year and BAME groups value parks and green spaces more than double the UK average at £70.08 per year.

Further analysis shows that being a frequent park user is associated with a reduction in GP-related medical costs which is estimated to save NHS Scotland around £9.1 million per year, that figure is just a partial cost saving and does not account for other savings from reduced prescribing, referrals or social care costs.

Our data shows different drivers for using parks and green spaces across different user groups but there are clear social motivations for use, reinforcing the position that parks and green spaces improve community cohesion by offering shared spaces for community connections and a place to tackle social isolation.

Planning, Infrastructure and Fields in Trust

Ensuring that there is equitable provision of accessible parks and green space has been a key priority for Fields in Trust since the 1930s. Our *Guidance for Outdoor Sport and Play*^{xi} is both respected and valued across the sector and the current version takes account of revised planning frameworks in Scotland.

Nation/Region	Green space provision (acres)	Green space per 1,000 population (acres)	Green space protected by Fields in Trust (%)
Scotland	52,843	9.9	10%
Glasgow	3,857	6.5	28%
Edinburgh	3,085	6.5	26%
Dundee	1,437	9.7	25%

OS Greenspace open data October 2017 has been used for this analysis which designates green space as playing fields, sport facilities (including bowling greens and tennis courts), play spaces, public parks and gardens per 1,000 population, it also includes national parks and common land hence an over-provision in rural areas.

The planning process is crucial to ensuring a sufficiency of formal and informal recreation space but in isolation cannot ensure the future security of these spaces from development. In a move to create a legacy from the 2014 Commonwealth Games, Glasgow City Council^{xii} protected 27 of its parks with Fields in Trust meaning the use is secured under legal agreement for recreation. This covers some well-known parks in the city including Cathkin Braes, Rosshall Park and Glasgow Green, as well as neighbourhood playing fields and recreation grounds. The City Council's Open Spaces Strategy recognises the health, wellbeing and play benefits these spaces provide as one of five key priorities and this will support the strategic direction for the Council's Parks and Maintenance strategy. By protecting green spaces in this way, the City Council has removed the possibility of non-recreational development proposals threatening these spaces in the future, at a time when there is pressure on land for housing and commercial development.

Key stakeholders such as Friends of the Park or community groups can also influence change, and on numerous occasions local park users have lobbied to get their local park protected for future generations to enjoy. Fields in Trust has found that securing the future of a green space through protection in perpetuity can catalyse community involvement in a local area and external grant funders often recognise the long-term commitment of a site that is legally protected and feels assured to make an investment. However, third party campaigns and individual lobbying could result in unequal provision and reflect a lack of consistency between local authorities – or areas within a local authority – if there is no base standard against which green space provision is judged. Areas with the most active campaigns secure protection of sites, whilst other neighbourhoods, equally in need, are less well served.

Whilst several models of innovative funding have been attempted, no one approach has proven effective in all circumstances. Community-led, commercial, sporting and heritage funding can each

help redevelop parks and playgrounds. Not every neighbourhood is equally likely to generate the same level of community engagement – and often those who have arguably the greatest need for a universal free public service such as parks, can only access the poorest quality provision. Whilst some green spaces are fortunate to have an active volunteer network, they don't have the necessary infrastructure or funds to take on the role of local councils in the provision, maintenance and improvement of parks. Fields in Trust believe that such a fundamental change to the model of how parks are operated would result in inequality in terms of quality and quantity of provision between different councils and geographical areas.

A ground-breaking piece of legislation in the Welsh Assembly, The Well-being of Future Generations Act (Wales) 2015^{xiii}, requires public bodies to consider long-term impacts of decisions they take and ensure communities are supported sustainably. Protecting outdoor recreational space means it will remain available for future generations to enjoy, forever. The Welsh Government has recognised that for children growing up in Wales, poverty is experienced not just as a financial constraint but can encompass "*poverty of experience, opportunity and aspiration*". In response they have developed an anti-poverty strategy which places a legal duty on every local authority in Wales to assess and secure sufficient play opportunities for children in their area. *The Play Sufficiency Duty*^{xiv} requires each council to ensure that they review their provision for play; including parks, playgrounds and other outdoor spaces. Each authority must develop a plan to deliver it and report to the Welsh Government annually of the action they are taking.

Conclusion

Parks and green spaces are not simply nice to have; they are a necessity for healthy, happy communities positively impacting on a range of key wellbeing issues from physical and mental health, childhood obesity to social cohesion. Access to parks and green spaces can help us to stay physically and mentally well, reduce social isolation and instil pride in our local communities. Whether it is playing sport, socialising with friends or taking a moment for quiet reflection, parks and green spaces quite simply make us happier. Fields in Trust is seeking to change the conversation around parks and green spaces and consider how we measure their contribution to our communities, at a time when their future looks uncertain.

We know from evidence already referenced that improving the availability across the social gradient of good quality local green spaces very close to where people live and spend their day will help reduce health inequalities. The continued decimation of our parks and green space services will, according to the findings of our research, more negatively impact the lives of lower socio-economic groups than others.

The substantial and quantifiable health and wellbeing benefits detailed in our study help to make a robust, evidence-led business case for parks and green spaces to be considered in terms of their contribution to society rather than being assessed simply in terms of their cost. We have also been able to demonstrate in economic terms the contribution that parks and green spaces make to the

preventative health agenda. We believe this new research will help to support more informed judgements when difficult choices must be made about how best to use land.

Fields in Trust recommend:

- At present there is disparity between areas where parks and open spaces have been secured in perpetuity – for example by a Minute of Agreement with Fields in Trust and others where no such safeguard is in place. **Fields in Trust support statutory provision of outdoor green spaces with a sufficient area for play, sport and recreation maintained to an agreed standard and available to all communities.** Fields in Trust also calls for the introduction of a statutory consultation process when development is proposed on parks and green spaces in contravention to local development plans and Scottish Planning Policy, mirroring the statutory consultee role that Sportscotland carry out with regards to playing fields.
- In response to the recommendations in the House of Commons Communities and Local Government Select Committee Inquiry: The Future of Public Parks in 2016^{xy}, the UK Parliament has recently established a Parks Action Group to help England's public parks and green spaces meet the needs of communities now and in the future. Formed from sector professionals including Helen Griffiths, Fields in Trust Chief Executive, the group is tasked with applying their expertise to inform a new cross-departmental group including officials from across UK Government departments. **Fields in Trust recommends that an equivalent Parks Action Group is established in Scotland and would welcome the opportunity to further our work with colleagues across the sector.**
- The full report 'Revaluing Parks and Green Spaces: Measuring their Economic and Wellbeing Value to Individuals' and a summary paper will be made available to MSPs and will also available to download from the Fields in Trust website www.fieldsintrust.org. The new data quantifies the significant value of parks and green spaces to individuals in the UK. Our aim is to develop the research into a Local Valuation Model by applying the value to individual parks and green spaces. **Fields in Trust encourage local authorities to engage in the research findings to help direct future policy decisions and investment strategies relating to the continued provision of local parks and green spaces.**

ⁱ Public Health England Getting everybody active every day, 2014

ⁱⁱ Public Health England improving access to green space, 2014, Health Equity Briefing 8

ⁱⁱⁱ NHS Health Scotland www.healthscotland.scot/health-inequalities/place-and-communities/place

^{iv} World Health Organisation 2013, Physical activity promotion in socially disadvantaged groups: principles for action

^v Obesity Indicators, Scottish Parliament, 2016

^{vi} www.beta.gov.scot/news/scotland-a-daily-mile-nation/

^{vii} Natural Solutions to Tackling Health Inequalities, Institute of Health Equality, 2014

^{viii} www.gov.scot/About/Performance/scotPerforms/indicator/greenspace

^{ix} Fair Society, Healthy Lives, Marmot Review, 2010

^x Greenspace Scotland (2017) Greenspace Use and Attitude Survey 2017

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- ^{xi} Guidance for Outdoor Sport and Play: Beyond the Six Acre Standard (Scottish edition) (2017) www.fieldsintrust.org/guidance
- ^{xii} Glasgow City Council (2016) News website www.glasgow.gov.uk/index.aspx?articleid=19792 accessed Sep 12 2016]
- ^{xiii} Welsh Government/Llywodraeth Cymru (2015) www.gov.wales/topics/future-generations-act/
- ^{xiv} Welsh Government/Llywodraeth Cymru (2015) *Wales: A Play Friendly Country* Statutory Guidance to Local Authorities on assessing for and securing sufficient play opportunities for children [\http://gov.wales/docs/dsjlg/publications/cyp/141007-wales-a-play-friendly-country-en.pdf accessed Sep 29 2016]
- ^{xv} www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201617/cmselect/cmcomloc/45/45.pdf