



Our Manifesto for the UK Government: A Better Future for Parks and Green Spaces



Green Spaces for Good

A Better Future for Parks and Green Spaces



Fields in Trust are campaigning for local parks and green spaces to be central to a holistic approach to tackling the emergencies we face today across health and wellbeing, social cohesion, climate change and nature loss.

Parks and green spaces are a cost-effective solution for improving the quality of people's lives, helping to create better outcomes for society and enabling nature to thrive. Yet their future is far from secure.

Despite the overwhelming evidence of their positive impact, not everyone is reaping the benefits of local parks and green spaces.

Our research found that

6.1 million people don't have a park or green space within a 10-minute walk of where they live,

and the amount of green space added to new housing developments has **declined by a third** from those built before and after the year 2000. A Fields in Trust poll* found that

94% of people think everyone should have a park close to home.

Our research shows that the frequent use of parks and green spaces contributes £34 bn in wellbeing value each year. They are an integral part of our communities, and yet the huge benefits they bring are massively undervalued.

Systemic challenges such as inadequate Planning Policies coupled with a lack of sustained investment have resulted in a collapse in the quality of our parks and green spaces, with two-thirds now in decline.

At a community level, the safety and general maintenance of parks and green spaces is an increasing issue with **56% of people noticing the quality of their park deteriorating over the past 10 years**. This is largely a direct result of planning policy failings.

There have been numerous missed opportunities to significantly strengthen legislation for park and green space protection, and there are currently no visible plans to bolster the National Planning Policy Framework in that regard. Recent pots of funding for parks via the Levelling Up Fund are welcome but do not counterbalance the **£350m real-term cuts** to park budgets since 2010.

Our polling also told us that **95% of people think their local councils should have more funding to manage parks**. To truly deliver access for everyone and keep parks and green spaces in a high-quality state so they can serve their communities well, we need a comprehensive strategy and policies to both halt the decline, whilst at the same time ushering in a new approach to how we value, fund and manage parks and green spaces.

The upcoming General Election provides an opportunity for political leaders to set out a bold, ambitious plan to secure a better long-term future for parks and green spaces, and deliver this manifesto if they're elected.

We are calling on all political parties to commit to three policy goals that will protect, expand and improve the future for parks and green spaces for the benefit of both societal and environmental health.

*A Fields in Trust survey, undertaken in October 2023.

We are calling on the next UK Government to commit to bolder policies for parks and green spaces

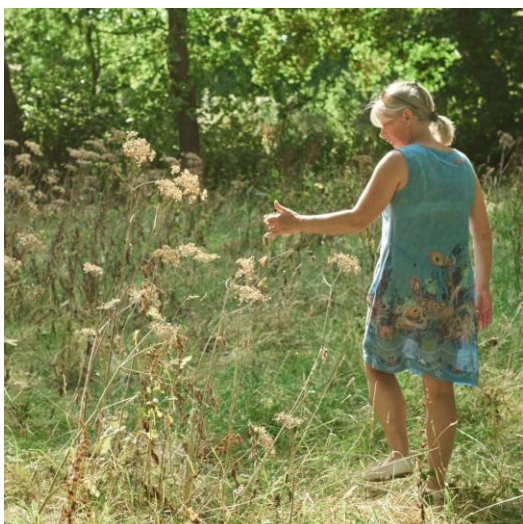


1. Access for All

Ensure everyone has a park or green space within a 10-minute walk of home.

2. Planning Reform

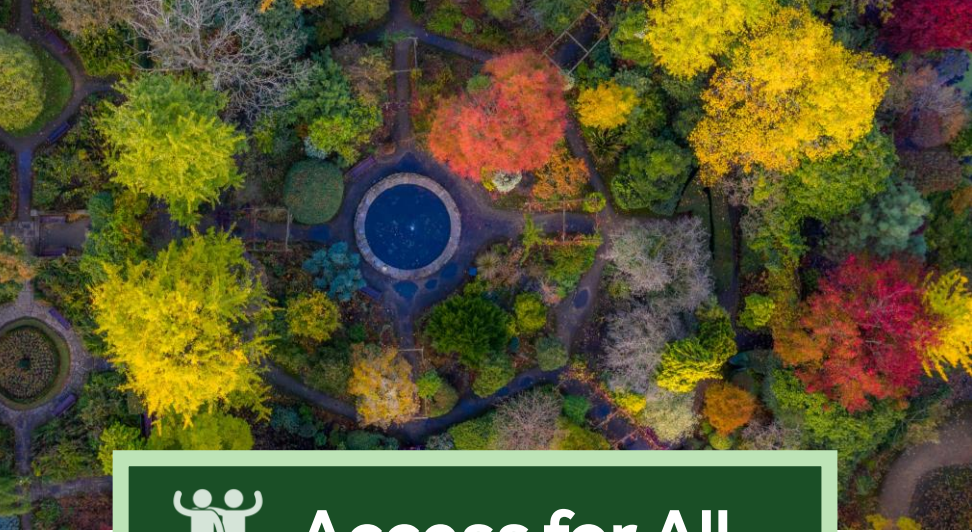
A planning system that protects and creates more new parks and green spaces.



3. Revalued and Reimagined

Increase funding for parks and green spaces to improve their quality and make them more multi-functional.

Unlocking more benefits for people, places and nature



Access for All

Having access to a local park or green space is something that everyone should be able to enjoy. However, currently that is not a reality for many.

Our annual [Green Space Index](#) highlights that as many as 6.1m people have no public park or green space within a 10-minute walk of home, with stark regional differences. There are extensive [inequalities in access](#), for example, areas with higher levels of ethnic diversity and people in low-income brackets are the most likely to live in green-space-deprived neighbourhoods. [Comprehensive studies](#) continue to demonstrate that poor access to green space can also exacerbate poor health. By delivering green spaces in every neighbourhood, quality of life will be enhanced across the country, particularly in the most disadvantaged communities.

Fields in Trust is calling for a park within a 10-minute walk of home to be the baseline standard for everyone. In its [2023 Environmental Improvement Plan](#), the Government has taken a positive move towards this and committed to everyone having blue or green space access within a 15-minute walk of their home. Additionally, the Scottish Government has used its recent [National Planning Framework 4](#) document to encourage planners to create more walkable neighbourhoods, where local facilities like parks and green spaces can be accessed in a 20-minute round trip from home.

Both are steps in the right direction, but the former plan lacks detail on how it will be delivered everywhere, and the latter is advisory, not compulsory. Furthermore, despite strong calls from health professionals that access to green space should be an integral part of [public health agendas](#), there is no joined-up approach across Government departments to deliver a comprehensive plan for implementation.

The need for a more holistic approach to park and green space access is key, especially as living standards fall, having a knock-on effect on health and wellbeing, and connection to nature.

91%

of people believe that parks and green spaces have become more important since the cost-of-living crisis began.

POLICY GOAL ONE: Ensure everyone has a park or green space within a 10-minute walk of home.

What do we need?

- A cross Government commitment to improve access to green space for everyone.
- A multi-disciplinary working group to advise on addressing the barriers to safe and inclusive access to parks and green spaces.
- Details on how the Government's Environmental Improvement Plan and Access to Nature goal will be delivered and assessed.



Planning Reform

POLICY GOAL TWO: A planning system that protects and creates more new parks and green spaces.

Currently, our planning system is not built on a people and nature first approach, resulting in a lack of protection for existing parks and green spaces, as well as a failure to consistently create new spaces which in turn would help bridge the gap and address the inequalities that exist.

There have been some notable moves to make planning more streamlined. For example, the Green Infrastructure Framework is a welcome step in the right direction, particularly around increasing green cover in urban areas to 40%. Unfortunately, **it's not compulsory and it doesn't have aspirational or agreed targets**, so it doesn't go far enough or provide the impetus to make the necessary changes to address the imbalances.

Likewise, **Scotland's National Planning Framework 4** attempts to improve the provision, quality and proximity of homes parks and green spaces with a couple of notable policies encouraging planners to take note and regenerate spaces where possible.

Whilst mechanisms exist within local planning such as **Local Green Space Designation**, they don't guarantee adequate provision of parks and green spaces to deliver 10-minute access for everyone. Despite already having a variety of natural features like woodlands and countryside, it is actually rural areas which account for over half the amount of Local Green Space Designations **not** urban areas, where the need for sufficient green space is more acute and would have a greater impact on more people.

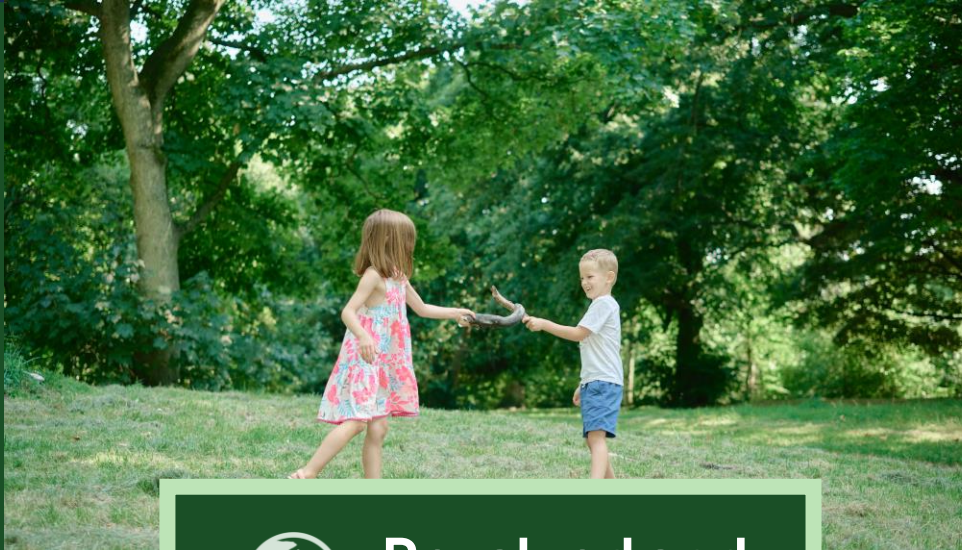
4,000 new local green spaces need to be created in the next decade just to maintain current provision levels.



What do we need?

- Clearer directives and aspirational targets to provide sufficient levels of local green space protected for the long-term.
- Greater legislative powers to embed the Green Infrastructure Framework into the planning process to ensure green space provision is an integral part of improving health and wellbeing outcomes in Local Plans.
- Amendments to the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) and devolved planning frameworks to ensure sufficient good quality green space is delivered in new developments and no existing green space is negatively impacted.

POLICY GOAL
THREE: Increase funding for parks and green spaces to improve their quality and make them more multi-functional.



Revalued and Reimagined

What do we need?

- Restoration of budgets for councils to maintain parks and green spaces which have fallen by £350m in real terms since 2010.
- Implementation of a cross-Government parks and green spaces strategy that supports a preventative health agenda and encourages nature-rich place-making.
- Ensure the future needs of parks and green spaces are anchored to these six key themes:

The responsibility for parks and green spaces has become increasingly blurred between Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) and Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA), resulting in a disparate and ineffective approach.

Decreased budgets and poor planning have directly impacted on the quality, safety and function of parks and green spaces. Examples of best practice only happen in isolation, and there is a lack of focus on quality design and of adapting spaces to meet local needs.

No other public service has such a wide-ranging, positive impact on local communities as parks and green spaces. Unfortunately, such spaces tend to be valued within local budgets according to their maintenance costs rather than their true value to local communities. **Our research found that frequent use of parks and green spaces generates**

£34 billion in wellbeing value each year

We also found that people from lower socioeconomic groups and ethnic minority backgrounds attribute a much higher wellbeing value when welfare weighting is applied.

Parks and green spaces can also help in the efforts to address the state of nature and climate. **We estimate that each year they capture the equivalent carbon to taking 320,000 fossil fuelled cars off UK roads.**



Accessible, safe and inclusive



Support active, healthy lifestyles through sports, play and physical activity



Support mental wellbeing



Resilient and can mitigate and adapt to the effects of a changing climate



Adaptable to changing community needs over time



Provide space for nature to thrive



THE TIME TO ACT IS NOW

98%

of people think the Government needs to do more to protect local parks and green spaces from development across the country.

Voters want greener neighbourhoods and sustained investment into their community infrastructure so that every neighbourhood works better for local people and for nature.

We are calling on the next UK Government to commit to delivering these three policy goals, unlocking the full potential of parks and green spaces to help address the key societal challenges we all face.

Get in touch

If you would like to find out more about Fields in Trust's work, please contact our Research and Policy Manager, Alison McCann at alison.mccann@fieldsintrust.org.

Fields in Trust is an independent charity with almost 100 years of experience protecting parks and green spaces. We work with landowners, community groups and policy makers to champion the value of our parks and green spaces to achieve better protection for their future at both local and national level.



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