

Cultivating Common Ground

The case for community greening

About Us

At Global Future Foundation, we use psychology to understand the emotional undercurrents shaping politics and society. Through research, psychological insight and partnerships, we help leaders, organisations and campaigners respond more effectively to the social, political and environmental challenges of our time.
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Friends of the Earth England, Wales and Northern Ireland (EWNI) is the UK's largest grassroots network. We're part of a global environmental justice community dedicated to the protection of the natural world and the wellbeing of everyone in it. We bring together more than two million people in 70 countries, combining people power all over the world to transform local actions into global impact. For more information visit: friendsoftheearth.uk and follow us on Instagram, Threads or TikTok at @friends_earth, or find us on Facebook, LinkedIn and Bluesky.

Postcode Gardener programme: Friends of the Earth's Postcode Gardener programme is a multi-year project funded and supported by The Co-operative Bank, helping to restore greenery and wildlife in over one thousand nature-deprived spaces across the country. Postcode Gardeners are professional gardeners who can guide, organise and support local people to connect with each other and work together to help nature to flourish in their local area.

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Foreword



Caroline Lucas

Former Leader of The Green Party

In Britain, we pride ourselves on our love for the natural world. From the ancient oaks of Sherwood Forest to the glacial landscapes of the Scottish Highlands, nature is woven into our sense of place and belonging. And yet many of our green spaces have already been degraded, others are under threat, and far too many people lack access to good quality green spaces.

As this timely report makes clear, there is a "green space gap", with ethnic minority and low-income communities living in the most nature-deprived parts of the country. As is true of global climate injustice, it is the most marginalised communities whose environments are most under threat, who are facing the greatest impacts of climate breakdown.

After another summer of heatwaves and wildfires, the need for good quality green parks and shading trees has never been felt more deeply. Yet, at precisely the time when the need for decisive climate action becomes more urgent, political consensus is breaking down, with parts of the political right retreating from net zero commitments and fuelling climate scepticism and denial.

In this context, local actions that ground environmental concerns in people's everyday lives become all the more important. Whilst trying to engage people with discussions of carbon parts per million and projected scientific tipping points is unlikely to be effective, people can connect much more readily with local issues: they care when the green grass turns crisp and yellow in the summer, when local bird and insect populations fall, and playing fields keep flooding. Working together to address these local issues provides an important entry point. A way to build environmental connection and resilience, one green space, one neighbourhood at a time.

At a time when our communities are becoming more fragmented and divided, these local initiatives present an opportunity for people to come together, building a sense of agency, ownership and pride. Here, green spaces can provide the fertile common ground needed for communities to flourish.

Policymakers should pay attention to this report, which shows what can be achieved when communities are supported to improve the green spaces around them.

Here, community greening provides a triple win – an opportunity to improve health and wellbeing, strengthen community connection and build climate resilience in every neighbourhood.

Executive Summary

Britons agree on the benefits of green space, but most are missing out. More than 80% of those who voted in the 2024 general election cross every major political party, from Reform UK to the Greens, say green spaces have a positive impact on mental (86%) and physical health (85%). Yet 62% spend less than two hours a week in public green spaces.

"Green space, it's a postcode lottery". Our new analysis of Natural England data finds that neighbourhoods in the highest fifth for publicly accessible green space have more than 20,000 times as much per person as those in the lowest fifth – where the average is just 0.05m², less than an A4 sheet of paper.

Britain's green space gap reinforces inequality. 28% of those in a household earning under £20k spend 2+ hours a week in green space, compared with 41% earning over £70k. Our new analysis of natural England data also exposed clear racial disparities with ethnic minority residents making up 34% of the population in the bottom quintile of total green space compared to just 7% in the highest the quintile – an almost fivefold difference in representation.

Green spaces elevate community connection and local pride. People who spend four or more hours a week in public green spaces are almost twice as likely to feel connected to their local community as those who spent no time in them (65% vs 34%). As one interviewee explained, *'Greening projects matter because they give people the space to come together to improve their environment, to look after their home, to take pride in their community'* - Ellie

Local greening initiatives provide an important entry point into environmental action, particularly for people who don't identify with climate activism. Although 66% are worried about climate change and its effects, just 3% would attend a climate protest and 5% would join an environmental organisation. By contrast, **almost half (49%) the UK public say they would be interested in taking part in a local project to improve green spaces.** As one participant explained 'it's not just people who consider themselves environmentalists who are interested' in community greening projects.

Closing the gap between appetite and action. The biggest barriers preventing people from wanting to take part in local projects to improve green spaces are time (33%) and health or mobility limitations (23%). Policymakers should make it easier for communities to take ownership of and green unused public land through a Right to Grow and provide long-term investment into green spaces and the community organisers needed to establish, maintain and sustain them.

The main report starts here. The following polling research was conducted by YouGov on 9th-10th August 2026. It used a weighted sample of 2,456 adults from across Great Britain. All surveys were conducted online. All quotes and case studies included are from interviews and focus groups conducted by Global Future Foundation with people engaged in community greening initiatives, including Friends of the Earth's Postcode Gardener programme funded by The Co-operative Bank. The report also includes new statistical analysis of Natural England data.

Green Space: A Postcode Lottery

Green Spaces Matter

It is widely understood that green spaces serve a public good, improving individual wellbeing, community cohesion and environmental resilience.

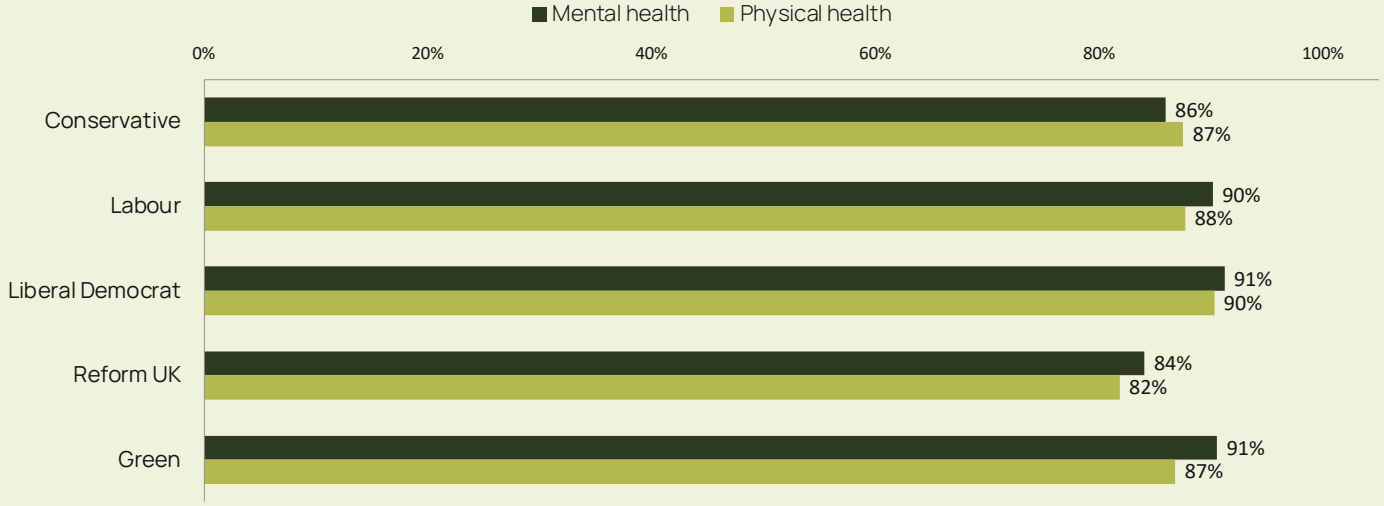
Here, we use 'green space' to include all patches of open vegetation – from public parks to private gardens, street trees to woodlands, football fields to forests – that provide critical infrastructure for both human and environmental health.

People across the UK are broadly aware of these benefits, placing significant value on nature. Far from being a concern of any one political group, appreciation of green space cuts across political divides. Our national YouGov survey showed that more than 80% of those who voted Conservative, Labour, Liberal Democrat, Reform or Green in the 2024 general election believe that green space has a positive impact on both mental and physical health.

What's more, when we asked people what the most important benefits to increasing green spaces in local communities were, 50% said improving mental health and wellbeing, 46% said supporting wildlife and biodiversity and 31% said connecting with nature. **Whether from personal experience or prevalent research, people understand that human flourishing is intimately entwined with the natural environment.**

'Green – it's good for our brains, it's good for our relationships, it's good for our communities' - **Andrea**

Those who believe green spaces have a very positive or fairly positive impact on mental and physical health by 2024 voting behaviour



Respondents were offered a 'don't know' option, but this has not been shown on the chart.

Unequal Access

And yet across the country, there remain deep disparities. As one participant from our focus group in Croydon explained, when it comes to *'green space, it's a bit of a postcode lottery.'*

To understand the scale and nature of the green space gap we analysed Natural England data across 33,755 LSOA neighbourhoods, measuring both the total green space and publicly accessible green space per person within the boundaries of each neighbourhood. This was then compared with demographic and deprivation data. To simplify the analysis, neighbourhoods were divided into five equally sized groups based on the amount of greenspace per person.[1]

Our analysis reveals stark inequalities. The worst 20% of neighbourhoods for total green space have an average of just 1.9m2 per person, compared with 2,141m2 in the best 20%. This inequality persists when considering only publicly accessible green space, where the lowest fifth averages just 0.05m 2 per person – effectively no accessible green space – while the highest fifth averages 1,033m2 per person. Indeed, the lowest-green space neighbourhoods have very little of every major green space type, on average containing less than 1m 2 per person of public parks, nature reserves, allotments, playing fields, golf courses, footpaths/access land or water/blue spaces.

This inequality in public access is particularly important because, whilst there are some benefits gained from simply seeing or being near to nature, the greatest benefits are gained from being in nature. One large study published in Scientific Reports[2] found that spending at least two hours a week in nature was associated with significant improvements in health and wellbeing. With this in mind, our survey data finds cause for concern with the majority of Britons (62%) saying they spend less than two hours in public green spaces per week.

Here, where time is a significant barrier for many people, it is important that green spaces are locally accessible. As one participant from our Hull focus group explained: *'we bang on about people being connected with nature and then send them out to nature reserves... but people can't easily get there. They don't learn to see value in the nature that's on their doorstep. It's about making green spaces where people are, where they can get to use it'*.

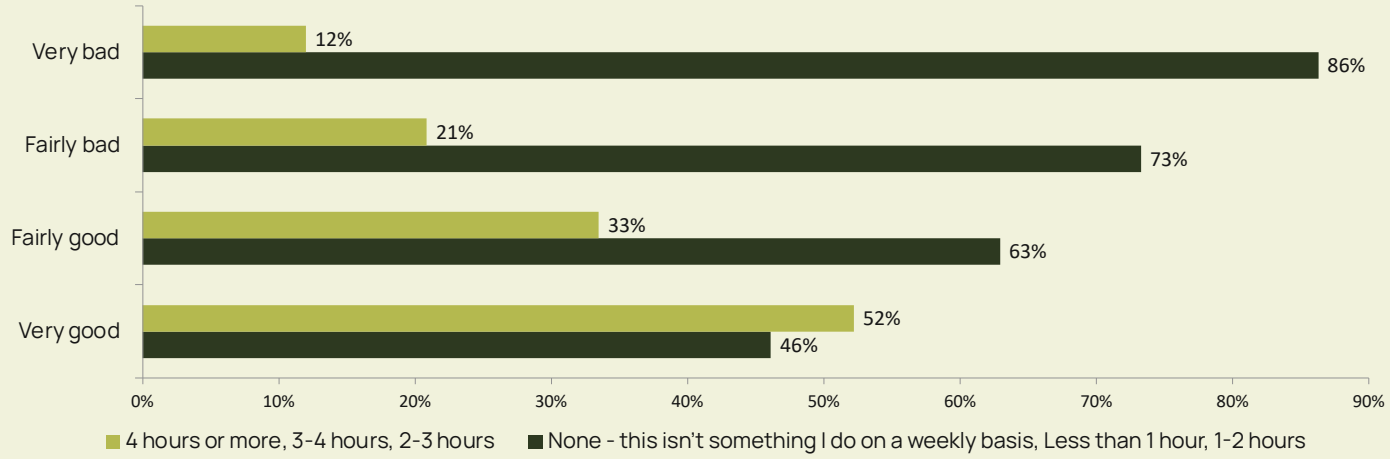
Considering Quality

When we discuss inequalities in access to green space, it's important to consider quality alongside quantity. Of those who rated their green spaces 'very good', 52% spent over two hours a week there, whilst of the people who rated their green spaces as 'very bad', only 12% spent over two hours there. Unsurprisingly, there is a close relationship between the quality of green spaces and whether people use them, and good quality green spaces are not equally distributed.

In our survey, various factors of quality emerged as major barriers to spending time in nature. Indeed, confirming these, interviewees described how littering, fly-tipping, a lack of basic amenities or poor maintenance prevent many people from enjoying public parks. Anti-social behaviour was another significant barrier, with participants citing drug taking and dealing being a reason for not spending time in green spaces, explaining that *'a lot of young people are really frightened to go outside'*. On this, a recent More in Common report[3] found that safety concerns

1. See appendix for methodology
2. https://www.nature.com/articles/s41598-019-44097-3

Time spent in green spaces in a typical week combined, by quality of local green space

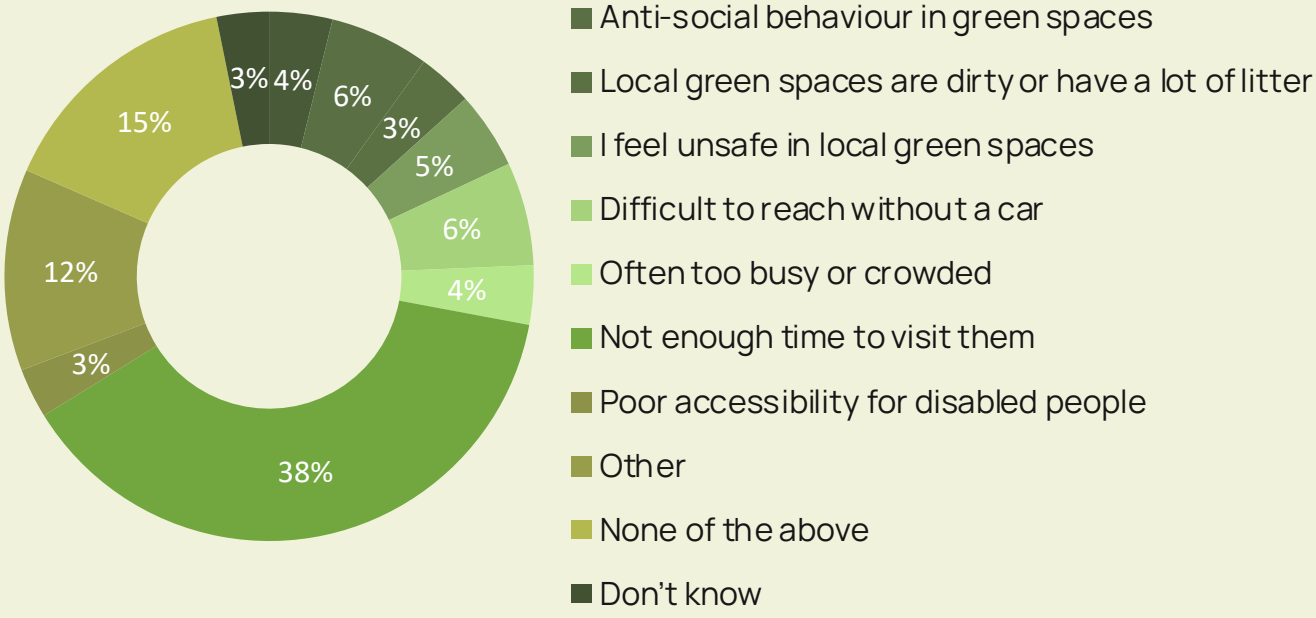


Respondents were also offered a 'don't know' option, that has not been shown in the above graph.

were a significant barrier to public green space use, especially for young women who were 28% more likely than men to feel unsafe in green spaces after dark.

Further, in the survey's open text box, one of the common reasons people gave for spending less than two hours per week in public green spaces was health and mobility challenges. This demonstrates the fact that proximity to green space does not necessarily mean people are able to use it. Improving access therefore means considering the wider barriers people face, from affordable and accessible transport and provision of basic facilities such as benches and toilets to broader interventions that support better health.

Reasons for spending less than two hours per week in green space



3. https://www.moreincommon.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2026/04/green-spaces-report-for-uploading.pdf

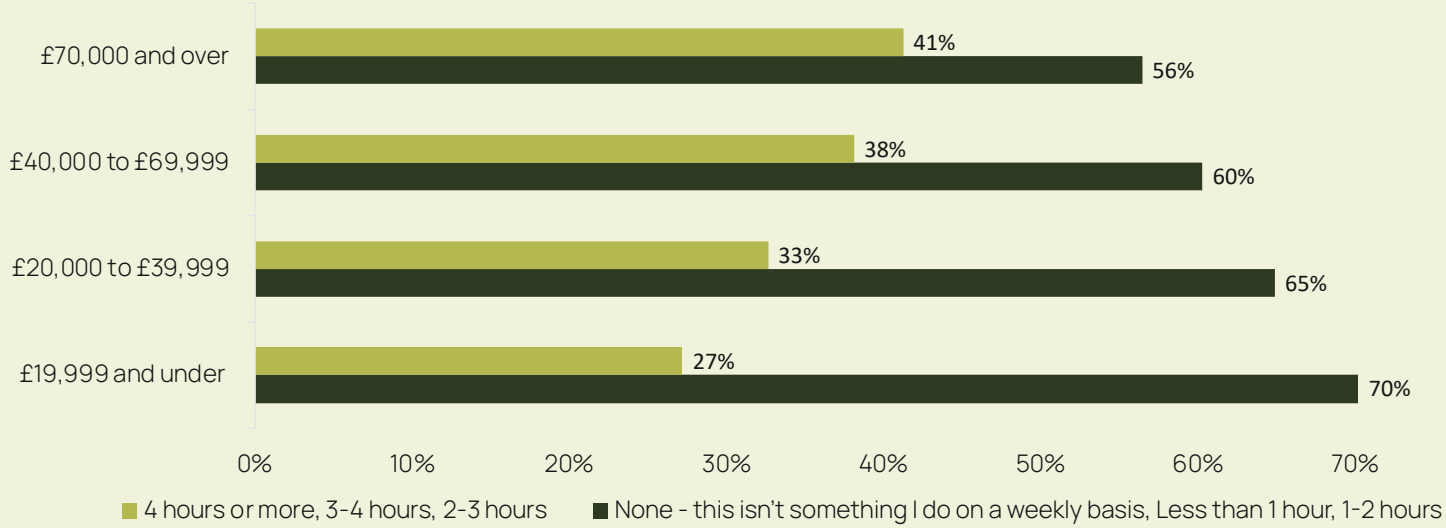
Compounding inequalities

Overall, our quantitative analysis of Natural England data reveals a clear pattern: access to green space is lowest in more deprived and ethnically diverse neighbourhoods. Indeed, green space poverty overlaps closely with economic and health inequalities. Almost half (47.1%) of neighbourhoods in the lowest total-green space quintile are among England's most income-deprived areas, compared with 7.5% in the highest quintile. The equivalent figures for health deprivation are 38.1% and 11.4%. Similarly, our recent YouGov survey data showed a clear relationship between time spent in nature and household income. **While 41% of people who earned above 70k spent 2+ hours in green spaces a week, only 27% of people earning below 20k spent 2+ hours in nature.**

The Natural England data also exposed clear racial disparities, with ethnic minority communities disproportionately represented in areas with the least green space. On average, 34.0% of residents in the lowest-total-green space quintile are people of colour, compared with 7% in the highest quintile – an almost fivefold difference in representation. Again, the recent YouGov survey data confirmed these trends both. Whilst 82% of white respondents rated their green spaces as fairly to very good, just 74% of ethnic minority respondents said the same. Additionally, in terms of time spent, 22% of white respondents said they spent no time in green spaces in a typical week, while 27% of ethnic minorities said the same.

To understand these inequalities, it is important to look beyond overall green space coverage, to consider the types of spaces people rely on. Here, the survey found that white respondents were 21% more likely to name a private garden as their most-used green space (55% vs 34%), while ethnic minority respondents were 10% more likely to name a public park (40% vs 50%). Taken together, these findings highlight a stark inequality: **ethnic minority communities are more reliant on public green space, while also being more likely to live in areas with less green space overall.**

Time spent in green spaces in a typical week, by household income



Respondents were also offered a 'don't know' option, that has not been shown in the above graph.

Table 1: Green space, deprivation and population characteristics by all-green space quintile, England

Quintiles: All GS - m^2 per person (1 = lowest GS)	Average	Average green space area (m^2)	Average green space area per person (m^2 per pop)	People of colour (%)	Disabled people (%)	IMD income: Most deprived	IMD health: Most deprived
1	215,707	3,347	1.9	34.0%	16.2%	47.1%	38.1%
2	353,094	23,568	13.6	23.3%	17.5%	38.3%	37.2%
3	557,258	68,667	39.7	17.8%	17.9%	32.8%	34.4%
4	1,282,586	206,484	119.5	14.0%	17.8%	24.3%	28.8%
5	16,916,278	3,735,518	2141.3	7.1%	17.1%	7.5%	11.4%
England	3,864,985	807,517	465.0	19.2%	17.3%	30.0%	30.0%

Note: Tables show averages across Natural England's Green and Blue Infrastructure Mapping data looking at Lower-layer Super Output Areas (LSOAs) in England. LSOAs are small statistical neighbourhoods, each containing a broadly similar number of residents. Quintile 1 represents the 20% of neighbourhoods with the least green space per person, while quintile 5 represents the 20% with the most. "All green space" includes publicly accessible and non-accessible green land; "accessible green space" refers to land that is free and open for public access. Deprivation measures show the proportion of neighbourhoods within each green space quintile that are among the most deprived nationally for income or health, using the Index of Multiple Deprivation.

Health and Wellbeing

Further, these spatial inequalities are significant because they serve to exacerbate inequalities in health and wellbeing. People of colour and those on lower incomes in the UK are already marginalised: less likely to receive appropriate healthcare and more likely to experience worse health outcomes as a result. Neighbourhood disorder in parks, such as broken glass, vandalism, and anti-social behaviour discourages outdoor physical activity, contributing to the elevated risk for obesity and other chronic diseases that poor and minority ethnic groups already face[4]. In this way, inequalities in access to high-quality green spaces don't just affect health, but actively compound vulnerabilities.

More broadly, green spaces play a critical role in protecting community health. Flourishing greenery, biodiversity, and tree cover reduce urban heat by around 1.5-2.5°C, known as the 'park cool island' effect, reducing risks of floods and the effects of heatwaves[5]. The extent of this protection, though, is dependent on the maintenance of green spaces.

These inequalities are compounding. In deprived communities, low-quality parks exacerbate health inequalities, while in wealthier communities, well-maintained parks reinforce health advantages. The result is a widening gap, where you live can both reflect and reinforce inequalities in health.

"As humans, whether we know it or not, we need green spaces. We're told that there's a crisis of mental health. I think part of that is because people don't feel rooted, they don't feel connected to the outside world... I know from experience that I physically need to put my hand in the soil every so often" - John Pickles, Postcode Gardener - Hull

4. https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0091743518300148
5. https://www.jrf.org.uk/climate-change/climate-change-justice-and-vulnerability

Green spaces have been shown to reduce stress[6], minimise behavioural difficulties[7], increase physical activity and lower the risks associated with conditions including cardiovascular disease[8], type 2 diabetes and obesity. They can also help regulate the physical environment, reducing heat stress as they moderate the urban heat island effect and improving sleep quality where trees and vegetation cover minimise noise pollution[9]. As the effects of climate change intensify, these protections will become increasingly important for more populated areas.

These benefits are significant at an individual and government level, as previous research from Friends of the Earth[10] estimates that frequent use of parks and green spaces is worth more than £30 billion a year to the UK population. Further, recent research confirms that regular access to greenspace can reduce GP visits by 28% saving the NHS £2.1billion annually.[11]

Mind the Gap:

Ultimately, by challenging and closing the green space gap, we may be able to replace negative cycles with positive ones, ensuring all people are able to reap the benefits of spending time in good quality green spaces.

Policymakers would do well to focus on inner-city areas where there are the most acute shortages.

Table 2: Analysis of England's Neighbourhoods in the lowest 20% of accessible/all green space per person.

Local Authority	All green space: Average area per person (m2 per pop)	Accessible green space: Average area per person (m2 per pop)	Tree canopy: Total land area (%)	All GS: Lowest 20% n'hoods (m2 per person)	Accessible GS: Lowest 20%
Islington	5.1	3.1	16.7%	77.8%	38.1%
City of London	6.3	2.6	3.5%	83.3%	50.0%
Kensington & Chelsea	9.7	6.5	15.7%	67.3%	56.4%
Tower Hamlets	9.7	6.7	12.0%	67.5%	47.9%
Lambeth	9.8	8.0	12.7%	69.6%	45.3%
Hammersmith &Fulham	13.0	9.7	10.0%	73.0%	56.5%
Hackney	13.1	9.1	14.4%	72.5%	42.3%
Newham	15.8	9.6	9.9%	63.2%	50.3%
Southwark	17.1	11.0	16.9%	63.6%	26.6%
Brent	19.1	13.8	11.1%	55.8%	44.8%

6. https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0013935118303323
7. https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/35134416/
8. https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC10953288/
9. https://www.bloomsbury.com/uk/restorative-cities-9781350112889/
10, https://policy.friendsoftheearth.uk/insight/englands-green-space-gap
11. https://naturalengland.blog.gov.uk/2025/05/21/growing-together-how-community-led-green-infrastructure-delivers-health-and-climate-benefits/

Lewisham	21.3	14.5	15.4%	44.0%	37.7%
Wandsworth	22.7	18.2	17.6%	67.7%	51.6%
Camden	23.5	19.4	25.8%	67.7%	43.1%
Westminster	23.7	20.4	20.7%	73.2%	56.9%
Haringey	25.9	14.8	19.9%	48.3%	22.4%
Luton	26.5	16.0	8.4%	51.2%	38.4%
Barking and Dagenham	27.3	22.1	7.8%	54.8%	42.6%
Slough	28.8	12.6	12.3%	41.7%	31.0%
Ealing	31.2	12.2	12.6%	38.2%	34.2%
Kingston upon Hull	32.2	16.4	9.2%	44.6%	33.9%
Wolverhampton	34.2	14.0	14.6%	23.0%	26.7%
Blackpool	35.8	17.4	7.4%	50.0%	43.6%
Reading	35.9	15.2	15.4%	32.0%	35.0%
Leicester	37.7	21.1	14.0%	45.0%	34.5%
Waltham Forest	38.6	20.7	18.7%	50.0%	34.2%
Sutton	38.9	18.8	14.5%	38.2%	30.1%
Harrow	39.9	18.8	20.6%	39.6%	43.8%
Greenwich	40.4	23.1	19.4%	42.7%	34.1%
Southampton	40.6	21.3	19.2%	24.3%	33.6%

Indeed, where inner city areas from Kensington and Chelsea to Tower Hamlets, Wolverhampton to Blackpool report some of the lowest scores for accessible green space, policymakers should prioritise making sure that urban areas are designed to support residents' health and wellbeing.

Crucially, closing the green space gap means addressing not only unequal provision, but unequal ability to benefit from the spaces that exist. There is a clear imperative to invest in green infrastructure that supports physical and psychological wellbeing and builds environmental resilience, while simultaneously saving the state money. Investment must ensure that spaces are safe, attractive and inclusive; shaped around the needs of local communities and designed to address the barriers that can prevent people from using them. This means focusing not only on how much green space communities have, but whether it is genuinely accessible and works for the people it is intended to serve.

12. https://wcl.org.uk/docs/green_gap_report.pdf

Case Study: Croydon

With around 127 parks and significant areas of natural and semi-natural habitats, Croydon is one of London's greenest boroughs. But residents describe the inequalities in access to green spaces as a 'postcode lottery', and research shows significant disparity, with the most affluent neighbourhoods enjoying 73% biodiversity access, compared to just 24% in the most deprived.[12]

It's in these communities, where tree cover is sparse and overcrowded accommodation common, that the impacts of climate change are felt most acutely. Inequalities can also be traced in the quality of the green spaces, with certain parks struggling with frequent littering, fly tipping and antisocial behaviour. Rather than supporting nature, wellbeing and pride, these green pockets become symbols of disrepair and neglect.

In the face of this, community initiatives across Croydon are bringing people together to transform green spaces into vibrant hubs for both nature and community, creating virtuous cycles of care. Sustainable Thornton Heath is working to make the area more sustainable and equitable, the Green Streets Campaign to end pesticide use, Good Food Matters to teach people how to grow their own food while various 'Friends of' groups – from Whitehorse Road to Heavers Meadow – are working tirelessly to maintain and improve green spaces.

Across these initiatives, volunteers emphasise the importance of seeing everyone as a potential ally for nature. They describe how visible change can inspire further involvement, as residents see grey streets become brighter and greener and realise that it is not just the council, but people in their own community, who have volunteered their time to make it happen.

Still, volunteers need organising, funding and practical support – especially in smaller green spaces that struggle to secure the same support as larger destination parks. Community action ultimately cannot compensate for wider structural inequalities – especially as it is often the communities with the greatest need that have the least time and resources to volunteer. Decades of declining investment can leave local spaces caught in cycles of dereliction and neglect, with those who cannot afford to move elsewhere left to live with the consequences.

Whilst council investment – in the heritage project at Ashburton Park, the protection of Waddon Ponds and the River Wandle, local playgrounds and outdoor gyms, and improved maintenance – is welcome, supporting communities to take an active role should also be a key part of the strategy, helping to create a virtuous cycle of ownership, care and pride in place.

Croydon shows the urgency and value of investing in the local greening initiatives in the communities that need it most, ensuring residents have both good-quality places to live and a meaningful stake in their future.



Image 1 - Isabelle Povey, Opening of the peace garden in Ely, Cardiff, Postcode Gardener project .

Cultivating Community Strength

Green spaces do more than support our physical and mental wellbeing; they strengthen the social fabric of the places we live. They provide spaces for people to meet, build relationships and develop a greater sense of connection to and pride in their local area.

At a time of rising loneliness and social fragmentation – where just 5% of Britons feel 'very connected' to their local communities – this function is particularly important.

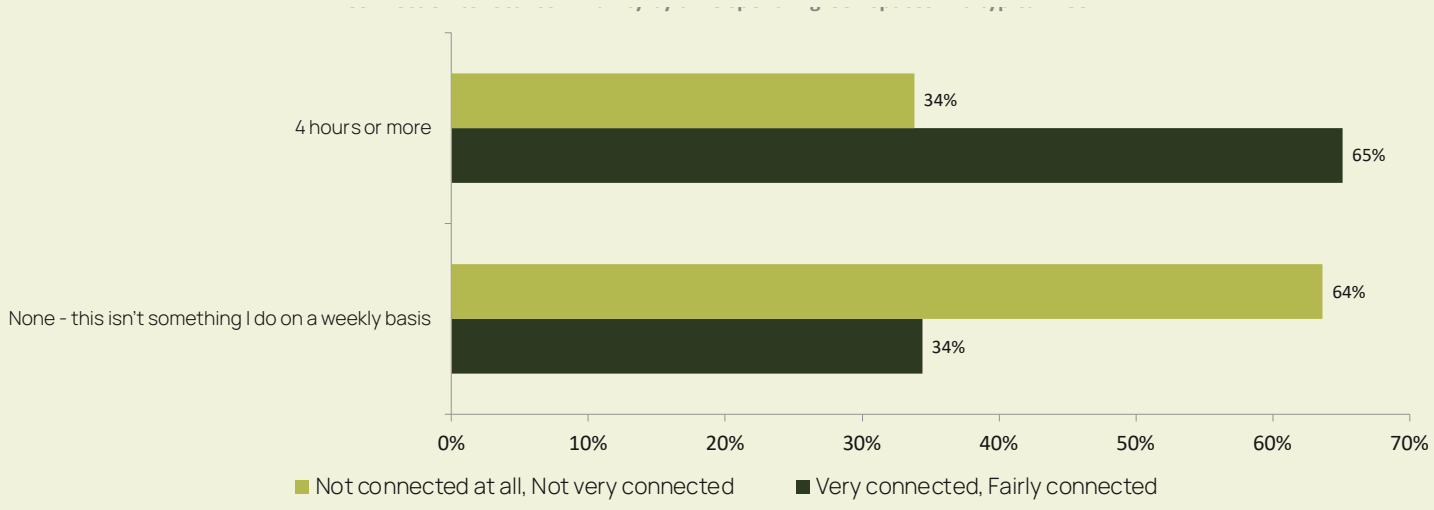
Widespread social disconnection has significant consequences, not only for individual health and wellbeing – with a recent WHO report finding that loneliness accounts for around 871,000 deaths globally each year[13] – but for society more broadly. In more fragmented communities, people are more vulnerable to crime[14], trust each other less and are less likely to vote[15].

Everyday Encounter

There are many factors contributing to social isolation, but one is the loss of 'third spaces' – informal places outside the workplace and home where people can meet without needing to spend money. As youth clubs, public libraries and community centres disappear, so too do everyday opportunities to encounter neighbours, build relationships and develop a sense of belonging.

In this way, green spaces provide important opportunities for people to come together in informal, unplanned ways – without being tied to any organisation or group, and without needing to spend money. Whether going to walk your dog, sit on a bench to eat your lunch or take your kids to play in the park, public parks become important places for casual and impromptu meetings.

Connection to local community by time spent in green spaces in a typical week



Respondents were also offered a 'don't know' option, that has not been shown in the above graph. In the 'time spent in green spaces question, respondents were also offered 'less than 1hr', '1-2hrs', '2-3hrs', '3-4hrs' answer options.

13. https://healthpolicy-watch.news/loneliness-social-isolation-linked-to-871000-annual-deaths-who-finds/
14. https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/1745-9125.12180
15.https://joint-research-centre.ec.europa.eu/scientific-activities/survey-methods-and-analysis-centre/loneliness/risk-factors-and-consequences_en

Our survey data suggests that these small interactions matter to people's sense of community. Among people who spend less than two hours a week in green spaces, only 42% felt very or fairly connected to their local community, compared to 58% of people who spent two hours or more.[16] Further, people who spent four or more hours a week in public green spaces were almost twice as likely to feel connected to their local community as those who spent no time in them (65% vs 34%).

Additionally, more than half (55%) of those who felt very connected or fairly connected to their local community said green spaces were very easy to access, compared with just 35% of those who felt not very connected and not connected at all (respondents were also offered a 'don't know option that has been excluded from this analysis). While these findings do not establish causation, they do help to add weight to the social and cultural benefits of access to green space and reinforces the importance of ensuring that good quality green spaces are accessible to everyone.

That said, access alone is not enough. Whether people can benefit from green spaces also depends on barriers including time, safety, mobility and the quality of the space itself, as well as whether people feel welcome and able to shape how that space is used. Indeed, when it comes to community connection, a sense of ownership and agency can be particularly important. As one participant, Tilly, from our Hull focus group explained, 'it's not necessarily about whether there is green space or not, it's the community understanding of what the green space is for, and whether they feel connected to it'. Learning about local nature, taking part in its care and having a say in how spaces develop can help build that connection, turning green spaces from somewhere people simply live alongside into places they feel invested in and proud of.

Local Pride

Finally, beyond social connection, our survey data suggests that green spaces have a significant impact on how people feel about the places they live. **More than four in ten respondents (43%) say green spaces make them feel prouder of their local area.** This echoes research from More in Common[17], which found that 32% of Britons identify their parks and green spaces as the biggest source of pride in their local area – more than any other factor measured.

If the government is serious about building pride in place, investing in green spaces should be central to that agenda. Green spaces should be seen as a vital infrastructure, helping people feel more connected to and proud of the places they live.

'Greening projects matter because they give people the space to come together to improve their environment, to look after their home, to take pride in their community' - Ellie



Image 2 - Postcode Gardener project, Ely and Caerau.

16. This analysis excludes those who responded 'don't know'
17. https://www.moreincommon.org.uk/research/parks-pride-and-place-the-role-green-spaces-can-play-in-building-pride-in-place-and-support-at-the-ballot-box/

Case Study: Lou

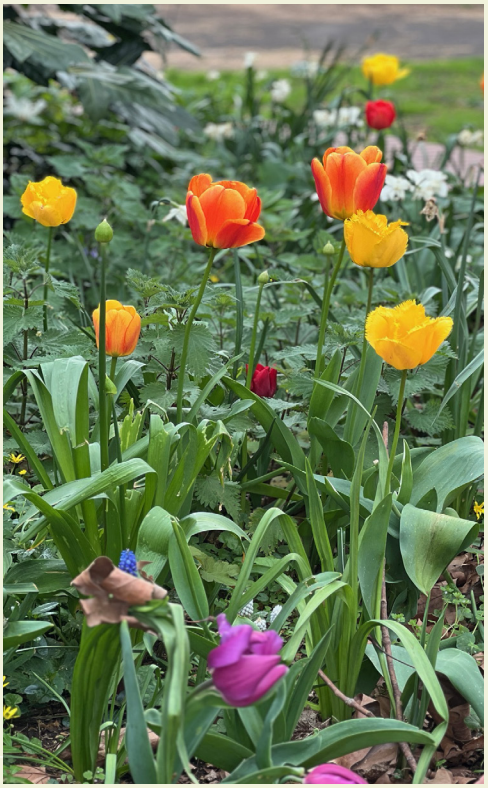
Barton Hill Postcode Gardener project

I've been volunteering to improve Gaunts Ham Park for about 13 years. The park is a beautiful little oasis, with lots of trees providing shade during the hot summers, but it also faces real challenges with antisocial behaviour, drug taking and dealing, and persistent littering.

We began gardening because we wanted to create a stronger sense of community. We've organised litter picks and planted many bulbs and wildflowers. It can be frustrating when people damage the plants or litter, but we've noticed that when the park looks cared for, people are more likely to treat it with care. It's nice because passers-by often stop to thank us for our work or simply sit and chat; and many of us who'd previously been working alone have found company, working together.

The gardening has helped me personally too. I live in a flat without a garden, so being outside and spending time with neighbours makes me feel calmer and more connected. We always have a laugh, and there's a real sense of achievement in looking back at a cleaner park or seeing something we planted grow. It lifts some of the weight because, instead of just talking about the problems, we're physically doing something to make a change.

Community work takes time. Organisations, funding and individual volunteers come and go, so lasting change cannot be made overnight. But the project has shown me that there are people who also deeply care about the park and that continues to give me hope.







Images 3 - Lou, Volunteer - Barton Hill Postcode Gardener Project

Community Greening

Where public green spaces provide a vital community infrastructure[18], community greening functions as a powerful multiplier, strengthening social networks, civic participation and environmental resilience.

Here, our data gives cause for optimism – with almost half of respondents saying they would be interested in getting involved in local projects to improve green spaces including community gardening (49%). Indeed, there is widespread appetite for community gardening, with more people saying they were interested than not across all regions of England (48%-61%).

To explore these benefits and challenges in greater depth, we conducted six interviews with people leading and volunteering in community-greening projects from Totnes to Cwmtyleri, alongside focus groups in Croydon and Notting Dale in London, and Hull. The Hull and Notting Dale groups primarily involved participants in Friends of the Earth's Postcode Gardener[19] programme which, in partnership with The Co-operative Bank, supports community leaders to bring people together and restore local nature.

Personal Benefits of Participation

At an individual level, participants described wide-ranging benefits. Many spoke about valuing the opportunity to be outside in nature, learning how to nurture plants and grow food all the while connecting to those within their community. Indeed, one participant from our Croydon focus group representing the organisation called Good Food Matters explained that the vast majority of volunteers do so 'because they're getting quite a lot back, a sense of wellbeing and achievement… connection, communication, social engagement'.

"The gardening is more a tool to help community building' - Jon

A recent survey conducted with community members who have taken part in Friends of the Earth's Postcode Gardener programme found that participants reported greater community cohesion, improved wellbeing, and greater agency over their local area. 84% of respondents agreed with statements that indicated a substantial improvement in well-being, and 82% of respondents agreed that engaging with a local Postcode Gardener project helped them feel closer to people in their community[20]. At a time when many feel a lack of agency and control,[21] these kinds of projects hold particular potential, with 91% of participants saying that the project made them feel as though they could help make positive changes in their area.[22]

Further, by working in partnership with local organisations these community greening projects provide a vital function supporting marginalised communities – from young people with special educational needs to refugees and survivors of domestic violence. As Cassie and Mobarak's case studies demonstrate, community greening initiatives can create important routes into community life for people who may otherwise face structural barriers to participation, helping to build confidence, connection and skills.

18. https://www.nature.com/articles/s42949-025-00272-2
19. https://friendsoftheearth.uk/nature/planting-more-postcode-gardeners-create-greener-streets
20. Forthcoming Friends of the Earth Postcode Gardener impact report (See Appendix)
21. https://concept.lib.ed.ac.uk/Concept/article/view/4291/5905
22. Forthcoming Friends of the Earth Postcode Gardener impact report (See Appendix)

Case Study: Cassie

Ferndale Postcode Gardener project

I love the garden. Every Tuesday, I wake up early, and raring to go because I'm so excited to see everyone in the garden. I've made some good friends there; we call ourselves the Dream Team.

The garden is my safe place. Usually, Mum and I spend a lot of time together because she looks after me, so the garden gives us both a bit of a break. She's happy because she knows I'm doing something I love, and I like the independence.

Gardening has given me so much confidence. I've learnt new things - how to grow flowers and plants, fruits and vegetables. I used to be shy before, but now I'm confident teaching others how to do things in the garden.

The whole experience has been out of this world for me.



Image 4 - Ferndale launch event

Case Study: Mobarak

Notting Dale Postcode Gardener project

When I first came to the UK as a refugee, I didn't have a work permit, so all I could do was volunteer. My English wasn't very good, and I didn't know many people. I was inside most of the time and became pretty depressed.

Volunteering in the community garden really changed things for me. It gave me a reason to get outside, to meet people and give something back to the community. Everyone was so welcoming. When I didn't understand they would use sign language to explain things, and each time I'd learn something new – whether it was a new word, or something about the garden.

I've always loved gardening, growing plants and seeing the bright wildflowers attracting the bees. With the recent hot weather, these green spaces provide vital cool spaces for people to come



Image 5 - Mobarak, Volunteer - Notting Dale Postcode Gardener Project

Finding Common Ground

Beyond this, community greening initiatives can build connections across divides, bringing together people who might otherwise have little reason to interact; 94% of participants in the Postcode Gardener programme[22] said they met people who they otherwise would not have met. One community leader in Croydon described greening projects as a 'really uniting force', involving people of 'all political persuasions and none'. Participants in our Hull focus group similarly emphasised the value of working side by side on a shared task, where the 'act of doing creates conversation' (Jon), allowing relationships to develop naturally and people to begin to 'feel like they belong'.

Psychological research supports this, explaining how cooperating towards a common goal provides an important foundation for trust and connection, without requiring people to address their differences head on. In a world where our communities are becoming increasingly fragmented, **community greening can provide important common ground from which relationships grow across divides.**

Community Ownership and Agency

Further, these community greening projects help to build a sense of collective agency, a belief that when people come together, they can make a difference in their area. This was particularly important for participants who lived in areas with low-quality green spaces, where anti-social behaviour and drug taking was common, where green spaces had become sites for people to dump their dog poo and household rubbish. Here, community gardening initiatives provided an important way for people to shift the tides. Whilst many described frustrations and the sense of it being an uphill battle, volunteers also described an important sense of achievement in uniting the community to make their 'rubbish parks' even just a little bit nicer.

Importantly, whilst council-led greening initiatives are welcome, participants explained that they can sometimes lack the necessary investment from the local community. As one participant, Tilly, from Hull described 'if people find they have ownership over something, they want to take better care of it'. What is particularly powerful about community greening, is the way that positive actions ripple out. When people see that their neighbours are volunteering their time and energy to clean up the park or plant some new flowers, they feel a sense of responsibility to keep the area in good condition.

Across several focus groups and interviews, community gardeners spoke of the way people would walk past and thank them for their work, noticing the wildflowers or appreciating the growing vegetables. This recognition strengthened gardeners' own sense of pride and achievement, but they also noticed a wider shift in how others treated the space: passers-by appeared more likely to pick up litter and help keep the area clean. This suggests a kind of 'reverse 'broken windows' theory of social order. Just as visible neglect can signal that a place is uncared for, visible signs of care and investment can encourage others to value and look after it too. These effects could spread further, with intrigued passers-by stopping to ask questions and learn more about gardening, biodiversity and local wildlife.

In this we see the powerful role that social norms play in shifting people's behaviour.[23] Where individual actions are shaped both by what people believe everyone else is doing (descriptive norms) and what people feel they

22. Forthcoming Friends of the Earth Postcode Gardener impact report (See Appendix)
23. https://psycnet.apa.org/record/2020-23031-019

ought to do (injunctive norms); to change behaviour and drive collective action, we need to first shift the social norms. Where a green space is uncared for, the norm is to litter and vandalise. Once a green space is clean and vibrant, a 'tipping point' is reached where anti-social behaviour becomes contrary to the norm. Here, by encouraging people to work together to improve their neighbourhoods, community gardening initiatives provide an opportunity to change the tides, replacing cycles of decline and disrepair with virtuous cycles of improvement.

Case Study: Flora

Founder of community project Pollinator Pathways

Everyone deserves to have equal access to public green spaces. Green spaces are invaluable, benefitting both people and the environment.

We can't always build new parks and large green spaces in cities, but we can create pockets of greenery, from little planters to trees along the street. That's what I've been trying to do with Pollinator Pathways – transforming tarmac and concrete into miniature wildlife corridors.

The initiative has created real change across the neighbourhood. In a short period of time, we've been able to make a genuine difference. The project is important because it brings together people from across the community, with a range of political views. Importantly, you don't have to believe in climate change or consider yourself an environmentalist to improve local biodiversity, to know that flowers are pretty, litter is bad and want to help. That's what makes this project so powerful - it unites strangers with a shared goal.

Volunteering with Pollinator Pathways provides a way for people to broaden their social networks, but it also creates positive feedback loops as new green spaces connect communities, and the community keeps the green spaces running.



Image 6 - Natalie Liow, Pollinator Pathways - St Marks Road, Easton.

Case Study: Notting Dale

Postcode Gardener project

The Notting Dale Postcode Gardener project works to bring vibrant pockets of nature into the concrete environment of the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea – which ranked third in the table for the lowest-green space neighbourhoods by local authority in England (see table 2).

Volunteers enjoy the project for various reasons, the welcome unplug from office work and technology, the opportunity for hands-on activities in the fresh air, and chance to spend time with people from the community. With a little nursery to work on potting seedlings, the project is designed to make sure people of all abilities can join in. And there's an opportunity for everyone to learn, to build skills and expand their knowledge of the natural environment.

Where the project tries to improve biodiversity, there have been some tensions with residents who don't understand the 'messy' results of a wildlife-friendly approach to gardening. But these can create important opportunities for volunteers to share knowledge – about the kinds of green spaces that are best suited to changing weather patterns and supporting pollinators. And for volunteers, the project provides a hands-on way to engage with the environment – when people notice the plants dying or pollinators disappearing, climate change becomes much more real.

The energy the volunteers bring also creates a powerful ripple effect; when people know members of their community are volunteering their time and energy to look after the environment, dumping and vandalism decreases as people feel a shared responsibility to take care.



Image 7 - Notting Dale, Postcode Gardener project.



Image 8 - Notting Dale plant sale community event.

A Gateway to Environmental Action

Local greening initiatives provide an opportunity to engage a diverse range of people with environmental issues, helping to bridge the gap between widespread concern about climate change and lower levels of environmental participation.

Our survey found that 66% of respondents were worried about the effects of climate change. Indeed, despite common stereotypes and increasingly polarised rhetoric, climate change is truly a crisis in common, with a majority (61%)[24] of the British public supporting the government's commitment to cutting carbon emissions to net zero by 2050.

That said, for many, concern does not translate into a willingness to campaign for change. When asked which actions people would be willing to take to help address climate change, considering the personal cost or commitment required, only 5% of respondents said they would join an environmental organisation, and just 3% said they would attend a climate protest. Indeed, despite cross-party climate concern (31%-91%), in this age of polarisation,[25] support for climate activism tends to divide along political lines,[26]



Image 9 - Isabelle Povey, Postcode Gardening session, Barton Hill - Bristol.

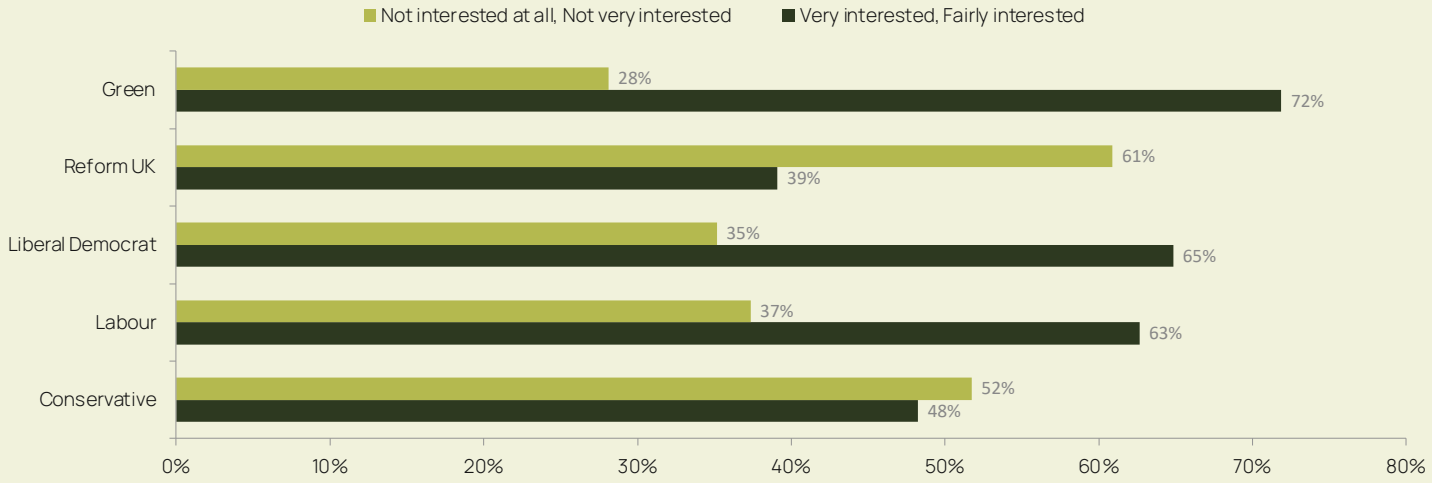
"Underpinning it all for me is green space and nature, but for others it's social care, it's about bringing those things together" Andrew

with 0% of 2024 Reform UK and Conservative voters saying they would attend a climate protest, compared with 13% of past Green Party voters. Instead, our survey revealed a broad appetite for making lifestyle change and taking local action. 32% of respondents, said they would be willing to switch to an energy provider that only used renewable energy, while 26% expressed a willingness to reduce the amount of meat and dairy products consumed. Additionally, there is widespread support for local greening initiatives, with 21% of people willing to plant trees locally, 21% to participate in a park clean-up, and 10% to join community gardening. Importantly, there is appetite to take part in local projects to improve green spaces across the political spectrum, appealing to more than a third (34%-66%) of voters of all major political parties in the 2024 general election.

Ultimately, whilst campaigning and political action remain essential to ensuring the systemic changes needed to address climate change and biodiversity loss, local greening initiatives can provide an important opportunity to engage a broad coalition of people in environmental action through the places and issues they already care about.

24. https://globalfuturefoundation.com/reports/a-crisis-in-common/
25. https://www.cogitatiopress.com/politicsandgovernance/article/view/10004
26. https://www.nature.com/articles/s41467-024-48112-8

Interest in partaking in a local project to improve green spaces, by vote in 2024 General Election



Respondents were also offered a 'don't know' option, that have been removed, and the results rebased in the 'interest in partaking in a local project to improve green spaces' totals.

Starting with Place not Politics

For many people, environmentalism is not what initially draws them to community greening. Among those interested in taking part in a local project to improve green spaces, 35% said they wanted to improve their local area, while 28% wanted to support local wildlife.

As one interviewee Flora explained 'it's not just people who consider themselves environmentalists who are interested in the project'[27]. This is part of the power of community greening. People do not have to adopt a particular political identity to take part; they can simply want a cleaner park, more flowers on their street or a better place to live. Importantly, participants don't engage as activists, but as engaged community members – an identity that resonates across the political spectrum.

Starting with place can also make environmental challenges feel more immediate and personally relevant. Building on the arguments set out in our previous Human Nature report,[28] community greening offers a psychologically compelling way to transcend the climate culture wars. It grounds abstract issues in people's lived experience, turning statistics about global warming and biodiversity loss into changes people can see on their doorstep – from dying plants to declining numbers of birds and bees – while offering a practical, achievable way to respond. In doing so, it replaces fatalism with agency and taps into a widely shared instinct to protect nature, making environmental action feel less like a political identity and more like an act of care for the places people already value.

Through actively engaging with nature, community greening projects also provide an opportunity to learn about and experience nature first-hand. Here, participants described how greening projects have increased their

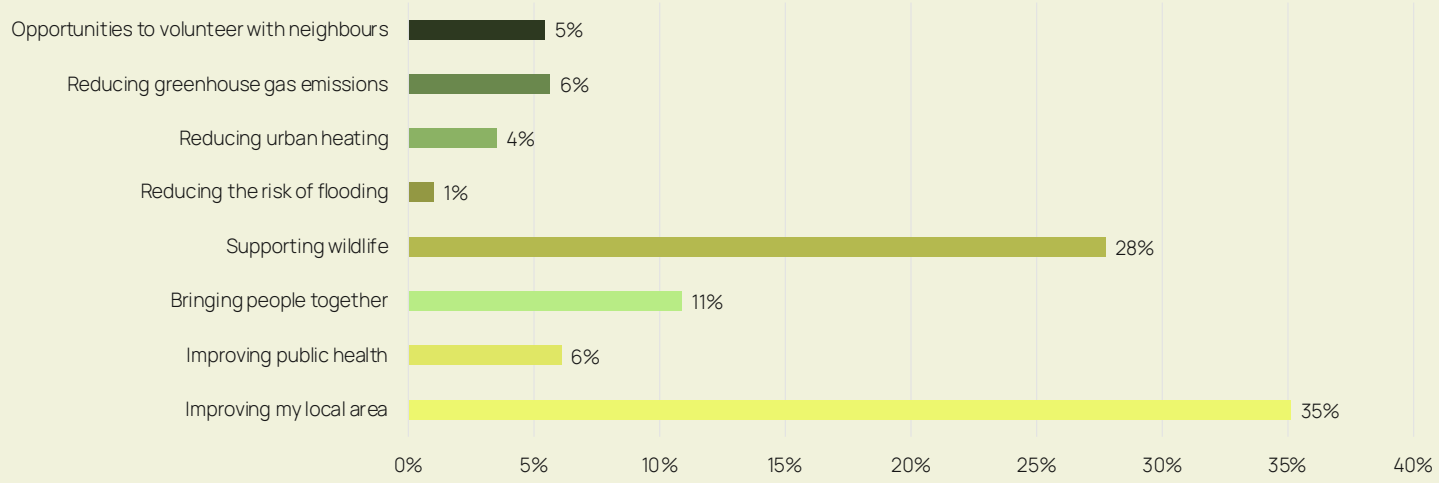
27. Independent interview conducted with Flora, Pollinator Pathways
28. https://globalfuturefoundation.com/reports/human-nature/
29. https://www.nature.com/articles/s41467-025-56732-x

understanding of what environmental resilience really means. While people initially viewed manicured lawns as 'good' green spaces, through engaging in sustainable gardening projects they came to notice the negative impact that short-mowing and pesticide use has on biodiversity,[29] learning to appreciate the 'messy' habitats of weeds and wildflowers. Spending more time in nature, they became more aware of their environments, and in turn more motivated to protect biodiversity.

Our survey found a clear relationship between time spent in public green spaces and willingness to engage in environmental action. People who spent more than two hours per week in public green spaces were 15 percentage points more likely to say they would take at least one of the forms of climate action presented (64% vs 79%). This points to the potential for a positive cycle of engagement: as people take local action, they see tangible improvements in the places they care about. This can strengthen connection and agency and encourage further action, both from participants and from others who see the difference being made.

Practical local environmental action can unite a broad range of people around a shared desire to improve the places they already care about. Through taking ownership, learning about nature and seeing the difference their actions make, people can develop a greater sense of environmental awareness and agency. While not a substitute for campaigns for systemic change, community greening initiatives can help expand participation in environmental action, giving more people a tangible way to experience the power of collective action.

Why are you interested in partaking in a local project to improve green spaces?



Respondents were also offered a 'don't know', 'other' and 'none of these' option, that have not been shown in the above graph.

Case Study: Ellie

Tyleri Postcode Gardener project

I'm very lucky to live in the beautiful valleys, but I think most people don't really notice the nature around us. My grandad used to talk about the buzzards and wildlife; he paid attention in a way that I'm not sure people do now - they don't notice the disappearing species, and I think we need to rebuild some of that knowledge. Having done a degree in wildlife biology and enjoy being able to share my passion for conservation with my local community.

When we go out looking for animals, people come up and ask questions. I think it's important to play into that curiosity, to draw people in and teach them about the local environment.

Here, the effects of climate change are becoming harder to ignore - we've seen heavy rain come and flood the coal tips, and wildfires around Blaenavon. It's scary. These aren't just things happening somewhere far away anymore; they're happening here and now. I think that while climate attitudes here are mixed, this has brought conservation more to the forefront of people's minds.

Personally, I struggle with climate anxiety. Gardening or joining a litter pick won't replace the bigger political action we need, but at least I feel like I'm taking action and it helps me feel better.



Image 10 - Ellie, pulling out Himalayan balsam.

These projects are great because they bring people together. It's lovely to have something on your doorstep; a welcoming, cosy community where people can come together to look after the place they share.

Case Study: Paul

Transition Towns Totnes

I run a project with Transition Town Totnes called Incredible Edible. It's great because it's sort of a gift economy - we grow free food for the public to pick as and when they need. It's so important for those struggling to afford fresh food at the supermarket and reminds people that food is something that comes out of the ground, too.

We bring the community together through volunteering, cooking sessions and apple pressing days. For those without a garden, it's an especially important opportunity to feel part of a shared community resource.

In our 30x30 Nature Recovery project we are planting up areas of Totnes with wildlife friendly flowers. People often walk by and say thank you, they notice the wildflowers growing in the small patches where there used to be dry, yellow, neatly mowed grass. They initially notice the changes because they look beautiful, but it can be an impactful start of building awareness about wider issues of climate change, conservation, and what it means to garden for wildlife.

When nature has been denuded over years of industrialisation, it's about leaning into the zeitgeist and teaching practical skills and sustainable practices. It's good to reconnect with nature and regain a sense of agency when we're all watching climate change unfold on the news. I can't necessarily change the wider situation, but what I can do is make this tiny area wildlife friendly, and that helps me feel less helpless.



Image 11 - Incredible Edible, vegetable patch.



Image 12 -30x30, wildlife friendly flowers.

Recommendations

Closing the green gap is an opportunity to do more than create and improve parks. Community greening can give people power over their neighbourhoods, create jobs and skills, support good growth and strengthen local pride. The challenge is ensuring communities are not asked to fill the gaps left by declining public provision but are given the rights, resources and long-term support to shape greener places for themselves, their neighbours and future generations.

UK Government Recommendations

1. **Give legislative backing to policies like the Right to Grow,** that create straightforward legal pathways for local residents and community groups to use unused or underused public land for food growing, orchards, pocket parks, wildlife areas and other forms of community greening. Government should also require councils to identify suitable land and establish transparent processes for community applications.

2. **Introduce a green space equality duty,** requiring councils and other public bodies to consider and report on the impact of major planning, regeneration, land-use and investment decisions on inequalities in access to green space.

3. **Use the Pride in Place programme to invest in community-led greening.** With 250 communities receiving up to £20 million over ten years and local residents helping decide how funding is spent, Pride in Place provides an opportunity to put green space at the heart of long-term neighbourhood planning. Government should encourage Neighbourhood Boards to prioritise greening, particularly in areas where the green space gap is greatest. Funding should support not only physical improvements, but the community organising, networks and ongoing maintenance needed to sustain them.

4. **Use the upcoming Access to Nature Green Paper to establish a cross-governmental Access to Nature Strategy** that:
   - Ensures green and blue space is fully factored into all urban planning, transport and development policies so that environmental improvements and restored habitats are included in situ.
   - Turns its 15-minute commitment into clear, measurable legally binding targets and statutory rights to high-quality green and blue space, measured not only by distance but by lived accessibility including quality, safety, maintenance, disability access, alongside social and environmental data.
   - Makes the provision of public parks a statutory duty for LPAs alongside sustained and adequate ring-fenced financial support.

5. **Make green space essential infrastructure for growth** by ensuring green space provision and maintenance is mandatory for all developments. For example, through new mandatory Green Infrastructure Standards for new developments, including requirements around green cover, quality and access. Developer contributions should help address existing green space deficits as well as mitigating the impacts of new development, with greater investment directed towards communities already experiencing the greatest gap.

6. **Existing green spaces should be protected from inappropriate development,** closing planning loopholes that could deepen the green space gap.

7. **Government should provide long-term funding to support the statutory provision and reverse the decline in parks and green space investment,** with funding targeted towards the areas of greatest need and where the green gap is widest.

8. **Every local planning authority should be required and funded to produce a Local Green Infrastructure Strategy.** They should assess existing green and blue space against mandatory national standards, identify inequalities in provision and quality, set local targets, and coordinate investment by councils, developers, infrastructure providers and other public bodies.

Case Study: Hull

Through the Postcode Gardener programme, Friends of the Earth and The Co-operative Bank have supported projects in three neighbourhoods in Hull. They bring together a diverse range of people, working in partnership with schools, youth groups and local community organisations to plant green pockets throughout the city.

People join for many different reasons. But by working in nature, noticing new butterflies or tasting hand-grown tomatoes, everyone starts feeling rooted, taking pride in the space they've created. Those who initially feel anxious find confidence as the constant action; as weeding and planting new bulbs fuels conversation and learning. Gardening becomes a gateway into community, especially for those who feel otherwise isolated.

These projects also provide environmental education, as green pockets bring nature into daily commutes, and physical signs are used to raise awareness of local fauna. Wild patches challenge assumptions that a 'good' green space means a perfectly trimmed lawn, as people understand the importance of planting for climate resilience and biodiversity. Small changes shift perceptions and drive support for environmental action.

30. https://incredibleedible.org.uk/right-to-grow/

Hull is at the forefront of the Right to Grow movement initiated by Incredible Edible[30], which allows locals access to, and responsibility for, small council lands. Early signs however show that despite widespread support, uptake remains limited. Participants pointed to fencing restrictions, vandalism concerns, and the significant responsibility of maintaining a space as the main barriers.

Hull organisers call for partnerships between the council, schools, and environmental organisations, practical environmental education, and investment into community champions. Effective policy must find ways for these wants to complement rather than compete with one another. Hull shows that community greening needs people with the time, resources and local relationships to turn permission into participation.



Image 13 - Focus Group - East Hull Community Farm, Rewilding Space

Council recommendations

Local authorities play a central role but have experienced long-term pressure on their capacity to manage parks and open spaces. At the same time, funding is often fragmented and short-term, making it difficult to plan strategically or sustain improvements.

1. **Map the green space gap and target investment.** Within local plans and Local Nature Recovery Strategies, identify which communities have the poorest provision and quality, who is least able to benefit, and where investment could have the greatest impact. Councils should report on the impact of major planning, regeneration, land-use and investment decisions on inequalities in access to green space, as well as progress in reducing these inequalities.

2. **Reinstate or create external funding officer positions** to help the council apply for grants in partnership with local organisations to support community led projects.

3. **Give communities a meaningful role in shaping and managing green space**.Move beyond one-off consultation towards sustained participation in the design, management and stewardship of local spaces, particularly with communities currently least likely to use or feel ownership of them. This should include participatory budgeting which is shown to instil a greater culture of ownership.

4. **Pass a motion for the community Right to Grow** and follow the work of Hull and others in implementing the Right to Grow. Councils could go a step further and map suitable public and privately owned land that communities can apply to use for food growing, orchards, pocket parks, wildlife areas or other community greening. These areas should have a presumption in favour of community use.

5. **Invest in green jobs and skills.** Work with local organisations, funders, and employment and skills providers to create apprenticeships, vocational placements and paid entry-level roles in horticulture, maintenance, food growing and habitat management. Community participation should complement, not substitute for, properly resourced public services.

6. **Manage green spaces for people and nature.** Councils should adopt wildlife-friendly management practices, responding to community concerns about pesticide spraying, excessive mowing and maintenance cutting back newly planted areas. This may require **reviewing maintenance contracts**, to integrate nature-management skills including expertise in ecology, tree and plant care, and support trusted local community organisations. Better management can support biodiversity, strengthen the local green workforce and shift perceptions of what a well-managed green space looks like. Councils should also ensure parks provide basic facilities, including toilets, benches and access to water, so people of all ages and abilities can use and enjoy them.

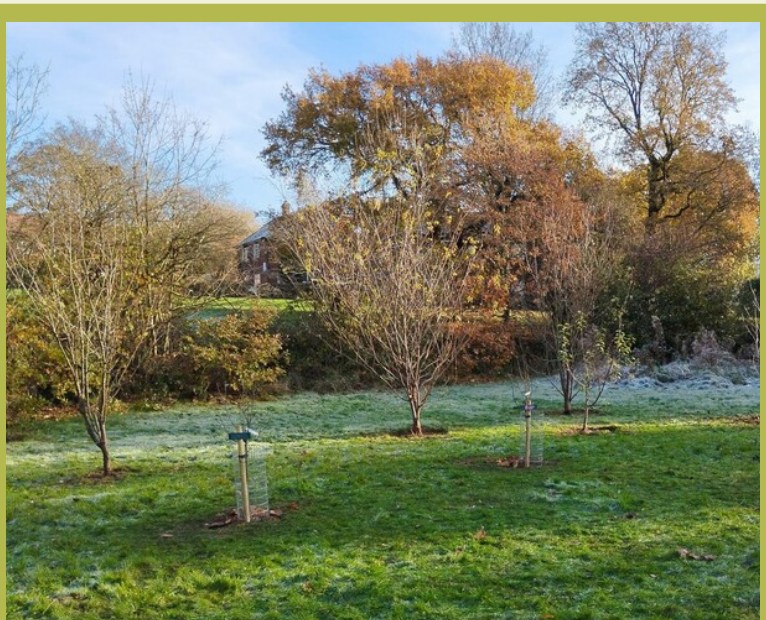


Image 14- Wythenshawe Postcode Gardener project.

Funders should fund projects that:

1. **Provide long term and flexible funding** that allows communities to take ownership over local greening projects. Rather than funding narrowly defined projects, support the outreach, organising and relationship-building needed to enable people who currently face barriers to accessing green space to participate.

2. **Focus on partnership.** Direct funds towards community organisations with established relationships with groups who are least able to access or benefit from green space, particularly in areas with the greatest green space inequalities.

3. **Fund projects that create paid opportunities for local residents to gain skills or employment** opportunities in horticulture, maintenance, food growing and nature recovery, rather than relying on unpaid community labour to compensate for declining public provision.

4. **Fund community greening as a route into wider social and economic priorities.** Initiatives such as the Postcode Gardener programme demonstrate how greening can create opportunities to work with a wide range of people and organisations, including young people, migrants, refugees, people with SEND and other groups that may be underrepresented in traditional environmental activity.

5. **Fund for lasting community impact.** Funding criteria should look beyond spaces created, trees planted or square metres improved to recognise outcomes such as participation, local leadership, community ownership and sustained use

Conclusion

Ultimately, closing the green space gap is about more than putting more green on the map. It is about making sure everyone has access to good-quality spaces where they can spend time in nature, connect with others and feel a sense of ownership over the places they live. Our research suggests that when communities are supported to shape and care for these spaces, the benefits ripple outwards. Neglected green spaces become places to build pride and community connection. Barren lawns and disused plots become opportunities to support biodiversity, develop environmental awareness and cultivate a sense of collective agency.

At a time of growing social fragmentation, deep inequality and declining political consensus around climate action, this is particularly important. Community greening cannot substitute for properly funded public services or the systemic action required to address climate change. But, with sustained investment and support, it can help create a virtuous cycle of greener places, stronger communities and greater environmental agency.

Acknowledgements

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www.globalfuturepartners.com

Friends of the Earth England, Wales and Northern Ireland is dedicated to the protection of the natural world and the wellbeing of everyone in it. We've been campaigning for over 50 years to hold governments and corporations accountable for environmental harm.

Friends of the Earth's **Postcode Gardener programme** is funded and supported by **The Co-operative Bank**, helping to restore greenery and wildlife in over one thousand nature-deprived spaces across the country.

Special thanks goes to all the organisations that contributed their perspectives to this report, including: the Postcode Gardener delivery partners (EMS, Wellspring Settlement, Rewilding Youth, Westway Trust, Pentref Tyleri and Arts Factory), Pollinator Pathways, Transition Towns Totnes, Sustainable Thornton Heath, Good Food Matters, Green Streets Campaign and Friends of Whitehorse Road and Heavers Meadow.

Appendix

1. Method and data sources for data analysis

The analysis draws on Natural England's Green and Blue Infrastructure Mapping data, using the Map1_OGL and Map3_Accessible_GI layers. Map1_OGL identifies a wide range of greenspace types, including areas that may not be publicly accessible. Because its source polygons can overlap—for example, where an area is recorded as both woodland and another greenspace type—the layer was combined into a single, non-overlapping greenspace dataset before analysis. This prevents the same land from being counted more than once.

A separate tree-canopy dataset was also incorporated into the analysis. Tree canopy includes woodland and trees outside woodland, such as trees in private gardens, streets and other built-up areas. It can therefore cover a larger area than designated greenspace and should be understood as a complementary measure of urban and rural vegetation, rather than a measure of publicly accessible greenspace.

The all-greenspace and accessible-greenspace datasets were intersected with Lower-layer Super Output Area (LSOA) boundaries to calculate the area of greenspace within each neighbourhood, and combined with 2021 Census data from the Office for National Statistics (ONS), including population, ethnicity and disability measures, and with the 2025 Indices of Deprivation for income and health deprivation. Population data were used to calculate the amount of greenspace per person in each neighbourhood.

Local-authority and regional geographies were assigned using LSOA-to-geography lookup tables derived from the ONS Postcode Directory. This produced a detailed neighbourhood-level dataset for England, used to examine differences in greenspace provision and its relationship with demographic and deprivation measures.

Note: This analysis measures greenspace located within the boundary of each LSOA neighbourhood only. It does not account for greenspace in surrounding or adjacent neighbourhoods, even where this may be close by and available for local people to use. As a result, an LSOA recorded as having very poor greenspace may sit next to an area containing a public park, woodland or other green space. The findings should therefore be interpreted as a measure of the greenspace provision within neighbourhood boundaries, rather than a complete measure of residents' practical access to greenspace near their homes.

2. Methods for YouGov Survey:

All figures, unless otherwise stated, are from YouGov Plc. Total sample size was 2,456 adults. Fieldwork was undertaken between 9th - 10th August 2026. The survey was carried out online. The figures have been weighted and are representative of all UK adults (aged 18+).

3. Methods for Postcode Gardener survey (Forthcoming Impact Report)

A survey of local community members who have engaged with Friends of the Earth and The Co-operative Bank's Postcode Gardener programme was conducted throughout July and August 2026. The National Council for Voluntary Organisations (NCVO) supported Friends of the Earth to design, deliver and analyse the survey which was shared with community members across all 17 projects. The survey fielded 186 responses from volunteers. All surveys were completed online.

