

## greenspace scotland media release

Monday 6 November 2017



### Scotland's parks and greenspace in decline

The 2017 Greenspace Use and Attitude survey published by greenspace scotland today [Monday 6 November] shows the downward trend in the deteriorating quality of Scotland's parks and greenspaces has continued. Whilst the survey confirms that Scots still love their parks, with over 90% of urban Scots saying it is important to have greenspace in their local area, the quality of Scotland's parks and greenspaces has continued to decline, and this means that fewer people are using their local greenspaces regularly.

40% of people agreed or agreed strongly that the quality of their local greenspace has reduced in the last 5 years (up from 33% in 2011) and this figure rises to 50% for people living in the more deprived areas (up from 35% in 2011).

From a peak, in 2009, when nearly two-thirds (63%) of urban Scots used their local greenspace once a week or more often; frequency of use and quality ratings have fallen steadily, with less than half (43%) of Scots visiting their local greenspace weekly in 2017. This is the lowest figure since the survey first started in 2004.

Julie Procter, Chief Executive of greenspace scotland said:

*"Parks are our natural health service and the findings from this survey have important implications for our health and wellbeing. We know greenspace is good for us – a daily dose of vitamin G could be just what the doctor ordered to keep us active and provide tonic for the soul, but falling ratings of quality mean that fewer Scots are using their greenspaces regularly. This has important implications for aspirations for an Active Scotland and tackling the obesity timebomb."*

What you find when you visit your local greenspace has a big impact on whether you visit regularly and are happy for your children to play in the local park. The survey also found that local greenspaces continue to fall short of people's expectations for them to be good places for children to play, safe spaces for physical activity, and somewhere to relax and unwind – with a 'gap' of around 30 percentage points between expectations and local realities.

Despite the decrease in frequency of weekly use, greenspaces are still an important free recreational resource for people of all ages and backgrounds; with only 4% of people saying they never visit local greenspaces. Encouragingly, the survey found significant increases in people wanting to have more of a say in how their greenspace is managed and to get involved in activities to improve their local greenspace; with respondents in the younger age groups and from the most deprived areas were more likely to strongly agree.

Greenspace use and quality ratings both peaked in 2009 and since then have fallen steadily. These downward trends closely mirror cuts in local authority budgets: benchmarking data from the Improvement Service shows that annual expenditure by Scottish Councils on parks and greenspace has fallen from £190 million in 2010/11 to £167 million in 2014/15.

Julie Procter commented:

*"Cost-savings on Council parks budgets over the last 5 years of less than the cost of one mile of new motorway or equivalent to less than the cost of one cinema ticket per year per person in Scotland have had far-reaching and unintended consequences on the condition of our greenspace. Even more worrying, is how this has impacted to reduce our use of parks and greenspaces."*

David Jamieson, Chair of greenspace Scotland highlighted that:

*“Greenspace is a classic example of ‘preventative spend’, where spending money now saves money later. There is a substantial body of research which demonstrates the positive impact that greenspace can have on our quality of life and particularly on health and wellbeing: people who live near greenspaces tend to be more active; greenspaces can help reduce stress and blood pressure. Health of course, is vitally important, but the consequences of neglected greenspaces go much wider and could impact on Scotland’s prosperity. Recent research by the City of Edinburgh Council shows that the social and financial benefits of greenspace outweigh the costs of looking after them by a ratio of at least 12:1. The quality of the local environment has a real impact on the people who live there. Places that are well-cared for, attractive and well-used project a powerful image of energy, confidence and success – signalling to investors, entrepreneurs and skilled workers that this is a ‘good place to do business’. Run-down, neglected and tired spaces send a very different message – depressing investment prospects, blighting people and places.”*

Mike Cantlay, SNH’s chairman, said:

*“The results of this survey are a big concern, as parks and other greenspaces are so important for both our mental and physical wellbeing. But there’s also plenty of good work going on, including our Green Infrastructure Fund, which has flagship projects in Aberdeen and the Glasgow area. We’re also working with many schools in disadvantaged communities to improve their use of local greenspaces for outdoor learning and play. We’ll continue to prioritise this area of our work and would encourage others in the public sector to do the same. Increasing greenspace and improving its biodiversity is more than good value in the long-term. Greenspaces not only have great health benefits, but also have social and economic benefits, helping to alleviate inequality and make Scotland a better place to live and work for all.”*

Keith Geddes, Chair of the Central Scotland Green Network Trust said:

*“Increasing access to high quality greenspace has an important role to play in helping to tackle the health and wellbeing inequalities experienced across central Scotland and this survey clearly demonstrates that there is a continuing need to invest in our greenspaces. In particular, it highlights the need to prioritise our efforts in Scotland’s most deprived areas where more people are experiencing a decline in the quality of their local greenspaces.”*

Parks across Britain have been feeling the pinch and falling ratings of greenspace quality isn’t a uniquely Scottish problem. Speaking in February 2017, on the launch of the Select Committee’s report on the Inquiry into Public Parks in England, Clive Betts MP, Chair of the Committee, commented: *“Parks are treasured public assets...but they are at a tipping point, and if we are to prevent a period of decline with potentially severe consequences then action must be taken.”*

All public services have been experiencing a financial squeeze but this year’s State of the Market survey by the Association of Public Service Excellence (APSE) found that 78% of UK local authorities agreed or agreed strongly that ‘the squeeze on public sector resources is affecting parks and greenspaces disproportionately to other service areas.’

Julie Procter concluded:

*Parks and greenspaces are one of our national treasures but, as this survey shows, we mustn’t take them for granted. There is an urgent need for action to reverse these depressing declines in greenspace use and quality – and the negative impacts that they are having on our health, our communities and our environment. We look forward to working with the Scottish Government, Councils and communities across Scotland to make sure that we all have access to quality greenspace, which meets our needs and improves our quality of life. It is essential that we continue to cherish, maintain and invest in our parks and greenspaces as vital community assets.”*

## Notes:

1. **greenspace scotland** is an independent charitable company. Our goal is that everyone living and working in urban Scotland should have easy access to quality greenspace which meets local needs and improves their quality of life. We work with a wide range of local and national partners to support the planning, development and sustainable management of greenspaces and green networks as a key part of the infrastructure of our towns and cities. [www.greenspacescotland.org.uk](http://www.greenspacescotland.org.uk) @greenspacescot
2. This research survey was commissioned by greenspace scotland, with funding support from Scottish Natural Heritage [www.snh.gov.uk](http://www.snh.gov.uk), the Central Scotland Green Network Trust [www.centuralscotlandgreennetwork.org](http://www.centuralscotlandgreennetwork.org) and the Scottish Government. It was conducted by Why Research, Edinburgh.
3. **Survey methodology**  
The online survey was conducted among a representative sample of 1000 adults (aged 16 and over) living in urban Scotland. The sample was provided by the panel provider, Research Now, and the survey was administered by Why Research. To ensure the sample was representative, quotas were set on gender, age and socio-economic grouping to reflect the Scottish adult population (as per the 2011 census data). The overall sample size of 1000 provides a dataset with a margin of error between  $\pm 1.4\%$  and  $\pm 3.1\%$  at the 95% confidence interval (market research industry standard).  
Further detail on the methodology, data processing and analysis can be found in report.
4. The **full report** is available at <http://greenspacescotland.org.uk/greenspace-survey-2017.aspx>
5. An extensive body of **research** shows how quality greenspace impacts positively on people's physical and mental health and wellbeing; children's development and learning; community safety and community development. greenspace scotland has published a comprehensive literature review of this research <http://greenspacescotland.org.uk/greenspace-and-quality-of-life.aspx>
6. A range of studies show the **financial benefits of parks and greenspaces**, for example, the City of Edinburgh Council published a Social Return on Investment study which demonstrated that every £1 invested in the city's parks provided a return of £12 in social, economic and environmental benefits, with health and wellbeing benefits alone being worth around £40.5million [http://www.edinburgh.gov.uk/info/20064/parks\\_and\\_green\\_spaces/1300/the\\_value\\_of\\_city\\_of\\_edinburgh\\_councils\\_parks](http://www.edinburgh.gov.uk/info/20064/parks_and_green_spaces/1300/the_value_of_city_of_edinburgh_councils_parks) More recently, a Natural Capital Account prepared for Sheffield City Council revealed that Sheffield's parks offer £1.2 billion of benefits; a figure 34 times greater than expenditure on service provision <http://www.vivideconomics.com/publications/natural-capital-accounting-in-urban-parks>
7. The Improvement Service **Local Government Benchmarking Framework on Parks and Open Space Services** indicates that over the six-year period from 2010/11 to 2015/16 average net council spending on parks and open spaces per 1000 population has reduced in real terms by 21.6%, from £27,814 to £21,794. There has been a year-on-year reduction across the period, with the rate of reduction accelerating in the last 12 months <http://www.improvementservice.org.uk/benchmarking/cultureleisure.html>
8. Association of Public Service (APSE) **State of the Market report on Park and Green Spaces Services** found that the squeeze on public sector resources is affecting parks and greenspaces disproportionately to other service areas, and 86% of Councils expect further park budget reductions in the next year <http://apse.org.uk/apse/index.cfm/members-area/briefings/2017/17-13-local-authority-parks-and-green-spaces-services-state-of-the-market-survey/>
9. The 2016/17 **Communities and Local Government Select Committee Inquiry on Public Parks in England** received more than 350,000 submissions, and over 322,000 people signed a 38 Degrees petition calling for local authorities to be given a statutory duty in relation to parks and greenspaces. The Committee reported in February 2017 <https://www.parliament.uk/business/committees/committees-a-z/commons-select/communities-and-local-government-committee/inquiries/parliament-2015/public-parks-16-17/>

The UK Government responded in September 2017, with Marcus Jones MP [English] Parks and Green Spaces Minister establishing a new cross-departmental group to look into the Committee's recommendations. This group involves Defra, Department for Health, Department for Education, Department for Culture, Media & Sport, Home Office, Department for Business, Energy & Industrial Strategy and Department for Work and Pensions. The Minister also launched a new Parks Action Group to help England's public parks and greenspaces meet the needs of communities now and in the future. This Group will include experts from the world of horticulture, leisure, heritage and tourism, and will be tasked with

bringing forward proposals to address some of the issues faced by public parks and other green spaces across England. To support them, Government provided £500,000 funding to kick start their work.

10. Ahead of the Scottish Council elections in May 2017, all the main parties made **Manifesto pledges** in relation to greenspace <http://bit.ly/parkmanf17>
11. As Europe's largest greenspace project, the **Central Scotland Green Network (CSGN)** aims to transform central Scotland into a place where the environment adds value to the economy and where people's lives are enriched by its quality. With an all-encompassing remit, far beyond just a 'green initiative', the CSGN aims to improve the social, physical, cultural and environmental health and well-being of central Scotland, as well as assisting the area to meet the challenge of climate change. The CSGN is one of 14 national developments for Scotland created in the Scottish Government's third National Planning Framework. The initiative is designated a national priority. Oversight of the CSGN initiative is provided by the Scottish Government to ensure progress is in line with Ministers' ambitions, as expressed through the CSGN Vision, the National Planning Framework, the Scottish Government's Programme for Government 'A Nation with Ambition' and other relevant plans, policies and strategies. For further information, please visit [www.centralscotlandgreennetwork.org](http://www.centralscotlandgreennetwork.org)

The **Central Scotland Green Network Trust** devotes all of its resources to driving forward delivery of the CSGN with a wide range of stakeholders including local authorities, regional partnerships, landowners, environmental groups and local communities, in order to help realise the CSGN vision. For further information, please visit [www.csgnt.org.uk](http://www.csgnt.org.uk)