








Breathing space

How our funding helps communities
use, create and improve outdoor spaces

Executive summary

This report shines a light on what our grant holders across the UK have achieved by providing more outdoor spaces, reasons to visit and use them, and ways to access them, through an investment of £527 million from National Lottery and third-party sources over the past five years. This investment is spread across four key elements, helping the voluntary and community sector to: acquire and create natural outdoor spaces like woodlands and nature reserves; build and improve developed outdoor spaces like parks and playgrounds; provide activities that take place outdoors and encourage the use of outdoor spaces; and increase access to the outdoors for all sections of society.

- Natural outdoor spaces 
- Developed outdoor spaces 
- Outdoor activities 
- Outdoor access 
- Overall investment 

Total

 **£220.2m**
1,985 awards

 **£321.1m**
5,741 awards

 **£198.6m**
3,031 awards

 **£6.6m**
76 awards

 **£527.2m**
8,362 awards

England

 **£159.5m**
1,476 awards

 **£230.9m**
4,029 awards

 **£142.7m**
2,147 awards

 **£4.9m**
47 awards

Scotland

 **£19.6m**
265 awards

 **£38m**
836 awards

 **£21.4m**
459 awards

 **£279,000**
17 awards

UK-wide projects

 **£21.1m**
92 awards

 **£7.1m**
260 awards

 **£3.2m**
76 awards


 **£453,000**
5 awards

Wales

 **£14.1m**
92 awards

 **£21.1m**
322 awards


 **£12.8m**
148 awards


 **£742,000**
5 awards

Northern Ireland

 **£5.6m**
60 awards

 **£23.8m**
294 awards

 **£18.4m**
201 awards

 **£208,000**
2 awards

Key findings

Every month, 1.8 million people use places and spaces improved through National Lottery Community Fund grants. A large proportion of these are outdoor spaces where communities meet, play, exercise and work. For example, our Access to Nature programme improved almost 2,800 outdoor spaces across England by building footpaths, adding signs, protecting rare species, and addressing overgrown vegetation. This benefited over 811,000 people across the duration of the programme.

Over the past five years, our funding has helped people get fit in the fresh air through **building, renovating and making better use of 224 outdoor gyms, 301 sports pitches and 49 footpaths.** In Pontypridd, Ynysybwl Regeneration Partnership took control of a local outdoor swimming pool and used our funding to improve safety and add new pipes, toilets and changing facilities. The following summer season saw 2,500 pool visits and 700 hours of volunteer time donated, with 19 new lifeguards either employed or trained as volunteers.

For every £1 spent on parks, there's a £7 return in value through benefits to health, wellbeing and the environment, and we've supported **2,171 park and green space projects** over the past five years. In partnership with The National Lottery Heritage Fund, our Parks for People programme funded 200 public parks across the UK, with visitors improving their mental health (58%) and physical activity (56%). In Belfast, our Connswater Community Greenway project added 16km of paths and cycleways, cleaned 5km of rivers, and gave an expected return on investment of up to £6 for every £1 of funding.

45% of our funded organisations say their grant helps them to improve local places, spaces, assets and facilities, which includes maintaining outdoor spaces. The Urban Wild Places project saw people in inner-city London trained and supported to reclaim unused natural green spaces, transforming them into community wildlife zones or food growing sites. Overall, 93% said that growing, harvesting and cooking together helped them get to know their neighbours better, and 100% of young participants enjoyed doing something positive for their community.

We've helped children develop social skills and grow up healthy wherever they live by **building, modernising and improving access to 683 playgrounds** over the past five years. For example, we helped South Lakeland District Council improve eight playgrounds in isolated rural areas by renovating equipment and making access easier and safer. We also supported Playing Out to plan temporary road closures so 339 communities could let their kids play safely on public streets.

23% of our grant holders say their work contributes to communities having better access to key infrastructure such as parks. Dementia Adventure helps people with dementia overcome barriers to accessing outdoor spaces. Through our funding, the group organised over 900 outdoor activity sessions, from woodland walks to gardening and farm visits, for 2,500 people with dementia and 582 carers. The project also saw people with dementia deliver training to carers and health practitioners, helping them be more confident in using outdoor spaces in dementia care and treatment.

Outdoor activities are a vital part of a healthy life and a key setting for social prescribing, which involves referring patients for non-medical community interventions to improve their health. Urban Biodiversity's Newquay Community Orchard project sees people with long-term health needs take part in such activities as tree planting, site maintenance and vegetable harvesting. Through the project, 19% of participants reduced their use of medication and 33% reduced their use of GP services, saving healthcare services money and resources in the short and long term.

We've supported **3,409 allotment and community garden projects** over the past five years, giving communities a shared outdoor space and activity across generational, cultural and economic divides. Growing fruit and vegetables in urban green spaces could also help keep food supplies in line with population growth, and we've helped the Incredible Edible network of 144 groups across the UK to grow food on more than 16,000m² of land, with over 6,000 people getting involved as volunteers.

We help communities explore nature, supporting them to **acquire, use and improve the accessibility of 833 woodlands and 428 lakes and waterways** in the past five years. However, some people cannot afford to travel to the countryside or do not feel welcome in some public places, preventing them enjoying outdoor spaces as much as others. We awarded Students and Refugees Together in Plymouth £9,000 to run walking groups for refugees, helping those new to the area connect with local nature, feel more comfortable in their surroundings, and meet new people to build their sense of community.



The Knowledge and Learning team at The National Lottery Community Fund shares insights from the experience of our funding and the difference it makes. If you would like to tell us what you think of this report, or share relevant findings and learning, please email us at knowledge@tnlcommunityfund.org.uk

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