



Knowledge and Learning

# Breathing space

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

Author: Temoor Iqbal



This is an  
interactive  
document

Navigate through the different sections using the links in the table of contents and the buttons at the bottom of each page.

## Acknowledgements:

We'd like to thank the charities, community groups and individuals whose work is recognised in this report.

We'd also like to thank the colleagues who gave support, and patiently dealt with our ongoing requests for information: Joanie Arthurs, Norrie Breslin, Helena Christie, Gillian Hart, Alayna Imlah, Owen Jones, Hywel Lovgreen, Claire Meighan, Matthew Riddell, Kyra Smith, Vicki Smith, Laura Venning.

# Table of contents

Introduction	4
Funding for outdoor spaces across the UK	6
Impact highlights	7
Natural outdoor spaces	8
Developed outdoor spaces	11
Outdoor activities	16
Access to the outdoors	21
Looking ahead	26

# Introduction

During 2020 and 2021, COVID-19 lockdown restrictions across the UK gave people crucial time and energy to focus on the outdoors. In spite of all the challenges of the pandemic, this led to a notable rise in outdoor exercise and visits to natural areas of beauty,<sup>1</sup> highlighting the human instinct to be outside when given the time and opportunity. This fits with what we know about the physical and mental benefits of being outdoors, with spending at least 120 minutes per week in nature associated with good health and wellbeing.<sup>2</sup>

Regularly spending this much time outdoors in the long term, however, is a different matter. Using young people as a guide, research has found that four out of five UK children lack a connection to nature<sup>3</sup> and 12% never spend time in natural environments.<sup>4</sup> While lockdown saw these trends change for some demographics, the effect wasn't equal – those from less privileged socioeconomic groups and those living further from green spaces were less likely to increase their use of outdoor spaces.<sup>5</sup>

This matches the pre-lockdown trend for minority ethnic households<sup>6</sup> and those with lower household incomes<sup>7</sup> – who are less likely to live near green spaces – visiting the natural environment less often than their peers.<sup>8</sup> Does this mean that only some of us are likely to get the outside time we all need as a society, now that things are getting back to normal? Or that the benefits of the outdoors are fundamentally unequal in a way that can't be addressed?

A study by the Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust provides some insight, initially finding that children from disadvantaged backgrounds showed less interest in being outdoors than peers from more privileged areas,

but also that this difference went away after just a single day of outdoor learning.<sup>9</sup> This suggests that at least some of the inequalities in terms of using outdoor spaces are surmountable practical barriers, and can be overcome by broadening availability, incentivising use and improving access.

That's where The National Lottery Community Fund comes in. The National Lottery Act 1993<sup>10</sup> identified the environment as one of the four good causes to benefit from ticket proceeds, and we have since been a major UK-wide funder of projects that benefit nature, the environment and outdoor spaces. Overall, 45% of all our funded organisations say their grant helps them to improve local places, spaces, assets and facilities, which includes maintaining outdoor spaces, and 23% say their work contributes to communities having better access to key infrastructure such as parks.<sup>11</sup>



Every month,  
**1.8 million people**  
use places and spaces  
– including outdoor  
spaces – improved  
through National  
Lottery Community  
Fund grants.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> from National Lottery and third-party sources over the past five years.<sup>14</sup> 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.



# Funding for outdoor spaces across the UK

(2016/17-2020/21)

Natural outdoor spaces 

Developed outdoor spaces 

Outdoor activities 

Outdoor access 

Overall investment 

## Total

 **£220.2m<sup>15</sup>**  
1,985 awards

 **£321.1m**  
5,741 awards

 **£198.6m**  
3,031 awards

 **£6.6m**  
76 awards

 **£527.2m<sup>16</sup>**  
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

# Impact highlights

Over the past five years, our grant holders have given communities new opportunities to:<sup>17</sup>



Get fit in the fresh air, by building, renovating and making better use of **224** outdoor gyms **301** sports pitches **49** footpaths



Explore nature, by acquiring, using and improving the accessibility of **833** woodlands **428** lakes and waterways



Play, explore, learn and connect, by building, modernising and improving access to **683** playgrounds



Grow food and flowers while growing closer together, by supporting **3,409** allotment and community garden projects



Connect with one another outdoors, by supporting **2,171** projects related to parks and green spaces, and by redesigning and maintaining **900** urban public parks since **1996** alongside other **National Lottery funders**

# Natural outdoor spaces

From rewilding meadows to preserving woodlands, a major part of our role is to protect natural outdoor spaces for the benefit and use of local communities. We've invested over £220 million to this end over the past five years, helping communities to acquire, use, preserve and improve access to 833 woodlands and 428 lakes and waterways,<sup>18</sup> with a positive impact on health and wellbeing, community cohesion and local economies.

**“A lot of places people meet either try to fix you or sell you something, while somewhere like a church or social club comes with assumptions about who you are and why you're there. Natural outdoor spaces don't have that agenda or that baggage, and that really liberates people.”**

Maff Potts  
Association of Camerados

## Wellbeing through nature

Aside from the obvious environmental benefits, why does natural outdoor space matter to people? For one thing, research has found that there may be a connection between some mental illnesses and urban environments, which exposure to nature can address. A study from the US National Academy of Sciences found that spending time walking in nature reduces neural activity in the part of the brain linked to mental illness and reduces 'rumination' – a type of self-referential thinking associated with depression.<sup>19</sup>

These benefits could theoretically be achieved in a city park, but the study found that they occurred after 90 minutes – a stretch of time that becomes much more practically feasible in open nature. Many communities across the UK already have access to the great outdoors, but for those that don't and those whose natural assets are at risk, the funding we provide to acquire and restore land can be transformative.

In Garvagh in County Derry/Londonderry, the local Development Trust used a £370,000 award to make the 600-acre Garvagh Forest a true community space. The woodland hosts health and wellbeing events such as mindfulness walks and outdoor therapy, but it's the focus on skills that has built a real connection between the community and this natural outdoor asset. Specifically, Garvagh Development Trust has agreed a Forest School partnership with six local primary schools to embed nature into all aspects of education, and is also running courses for adults in skills such as woodworking with reclaimed wood.



Garvagh Development Trust



## Scottish Land Fund

A collaboration between the Fund and the Scottish Government, the Scottish Land Fund allows communities to purchase land and buildings for local use. From 2012 to 2016, the programme put 83,929 acres into community ownership,<sup>20</sup> and the 2016 to 2020 round awarded £38.9 million to 231 projects.<sup>21</sup>

Of these 231 projects, 29% were for land and 8% were for woodlands specifically, highlighting a real appetite for protecting and enhancing local natural spaces.

For example, through a £326,750 grant, Friends of Glenan Wood in Argyll provided a natural community space of 361 acres. The project preserves the Atlantic oak woodland habitat through mitigating deer overpopulation and keeping invasive plant species under control, and is constructing a network of paths to make access easier for local people without disturbing biodiversity. The forest has around 1,000 visitors per year, and also encourages foraging as a mindful activity to boost mental health and encourage healthy eating.

## Coming together

As well as individual health and wellbeing, natural outdoor spaces can provide a sense of togetherness and belonging, bringing people closer together through shared local pride and community wellbeing. A 2015 study found that experiences of local nature may even have more of an impact on community cohesion than typical categories that link people together such as income, gender, age and education,<sup>22</sup> highlighting the fundamental role natural spaces play in our sense of what makes a community.

The Urban Wild Places project, run by Octopus Community Network through

a £365,000 grant from the Fund, had the twin goals of improving the environment and boosting community cohesion. The project trained and supported people in inner-city areas to reclaim unused natural green spaces in London, transforming them into local community wildlife zones or food growing sites. Overall, 93% of participants said that growing, harvesting and cooking together helped them get to know their neighbours better, and 100% of young people said they enjoyed doing something positive for their community, demonstrating both the instant and the long-term cohesive impact of the project.

Cohesion can also be encouraged indirectly, by giving people the opportunity to become closer. Forest Research has even found that simply being in natural outdoor spaces close to urban areas may make people more likely to behave socially towards strangers than they would in another setting.<sup>23</sup> We gave Plymouth City Council £419,000 to encourage residents to take ownership of local nature reserves and work to improve them in five of the city's most deprived areas. Following the project, 27% of interviewed residents said they visited their local nature reserve once or more per day and 26% visited at least once a week, giving people more scope, reason and opportunity to come together.

**66%** of our grant holders help community members mix with others who are different to them, and **60%** help people engage more in their community. Outdoor spaces play a key role in this support for community cohesion, providing settings for people to meet and build their sense of belonging within a local area.<sup>24</sup>

## Boosting local economies

The primary benefit of natural outdoor spaces is experiential – they give people direct enjoyment that can improve their lives in the ways discussed above. However, there are also indirect economic benefits to woodlands, lakes and open countryside, particularly when they're located close to where people live and work. In some cases, these benefits are passive – for example, research from the Netherlands has found that having a view of water increases house value by 10%, while a view of a park increases it 8%.<sup>25</sup> But there are also active ways in which nature can be positively harnessed to boost local economies and provide jobs without damaging ecosystems at the same time.

Timber is a prominent example here; there is evidence that forestry can be more economically viable than farming in some areas,<sup>26</sup> and small-scale local sawmills can boost biodiversity while also generating revenue.<sup>27</sup> North Sutherland Community Forest Trust in the Highlands used a £47,500 grant to purchase 88 acres of woodland. The funding helped to: create a forest trail to give locals access to a natural community asset, draft an agreement with the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds to ensure local wildlife is protected, and renovate a sawmill to generate revenue that is reinvested into local rural development. This has made a real difference to the surrounding economy, as local larch wood processed at the sawmill is now being sold for fencing and firewood, and the mill hires a local sawyer.

Tourism, similarly, is a way for communities to receive an economic boost from their natural assets while protecting them at the same time. With our funding, Kyle of Sutherland Development Trust was able to improve the Falls of Shin Visitor Centre, adding a café, gift shop and focal point to

draw tourism to this area of natural beauty. As well as directly generating revenue for the area, the centre has increased trade for local eateries and accommodation providers, harnessing the location's proximity to the popular North Coast 500 route.

## Our Bright Future

**Our Bright Future is a £33 million programme, which has given over 120,000 young people aged 11-24 an opportunity to develop skills, increase their confidence, and enter environmental careers – crucial in providing a skilled workforce for the green economy of the near-future.<sup>28</sup>**

After participating, the proportion of young people who felt confident in themselves doubled to 80%, demonstrating the social and wellbeing benefits of meeting and working with new people in an outdoor setting. By its 2019 midpoint, the programme had seen 26,190 young people increase their environmental skills and knowledge, 1,520 community spaces improved or created, and 411 tonnes of waste diverted from landfill.<sup>29</sup>

Green Leaders, one of the programme's 31 projects, supported young people to develop community activities to challenge local environmental attitudes. These included police-supported litter picking, park maintenance with young people with special educational needs, and bringing groups together to clear invasive species from beaches.

The project saw 1,190 tonnes of CO<sub>2</sub> saved and 12,645kg of waste diverted from landfill, with participants increasing their confidence to try new things (86%), work in a team (86%) and meet new people (80%). The majority of participants also left the project more interested in green jobs and more confident in applying for them.<sup>30</sup>

# Developed outdoor spaces

While the UK is fortunate to have abundant countryside that is free to access, the vast majority of the population – over 80% – lives in urban areas.<sup>31</sup> Realistically, many of us do not have the time or transport options to easily access natural outdoor spaces. This makes developed outdoor spaces like parks, playgrounds, allotments and sports facilities extremely important, and creates a need to make urban society as natural as possible. This is recognised in the government's National Planning Policy Framework,<sup>32</sup> which highlights green space and green infrastructure as key considerations in urban planning.

The benefits to this approach are societal as well as personal; urban green spaces have been found to boost nearby house prices by an average of £2,500,<sup>33</sup> generate revenue for local businesses,<sup>34</sup> and even reduce crime.<sup>35</sup> Alongside individual health and wellbeing benefits and a community-wide boost to cohesion, this means there's a real case to be made for developed outdoor spaces that serve the whole community. We've invested over £320 million to build, maintain and improve these spaces over the past five years, giving communities practical and natural assets they can be proud of.

After receiving Parks for People funding, parks saw an increase of **3.7 million annual visits**. Park visitors improved their **physical activity (56%)** and **mental health (58%)** after starting to use spaces funded through the programme.

## Parks and playgrounds

Parks and general-use urban green spaces are among the shared infrastructure that binds neighbourhoods together into communities, adding value for residents and visitors. The Parks Alliance has found that for every £1 spent on parks, there is a £7 return in value through health, wellbeing and environmental benefits.<sup>36</sup>

In support of this, National Lottery funders, including The National Lottery Community Fund, have awarded over £1 billion to more than 900 urban public parks since 1996.<sup>37</sup> We've also supported 2,171 projects related to parks and green spaces over the past five years. This has been through direct grants, but also through programmes like Big Local which give communities the power to direct funds as they see fit. Each of the programme's 150 areas across England has until 2026 to spend £1.1 million, with over 1,600 local people directly involved each year.

Ridge Hill Big Local in Stalybridge has taken control of two lakes within a local park, allowing the community to desilt and renovate the lakes before opening them for fishing to offer local families access to a therapeutic activity. Arches Big Local in Chatham, meanwhile, has given the community control of a local park in order to clear overgrown areas that were being used for drug dealing, start a litter-picking group, put regular maintenance in place, and build new play facilities.<sup>38</sup>

**“All outdoor spaces are owned by somebody, so permissions are needed which can restrict use and development. Community ownership of things like parks would be revolutionary, making them active spaces that are attuned to their local communities.”**

Maff Potts  
Association of Camerados

This last point is particularly important, as playgrounds and interactive outdoor spaces for kids are vital for healthy growth. They help children learn to take risks, which is essential for development,<sup>39</sup> and help them to build key interaction and socialisation skills more effectively than in indoor environments.<sup>40</sup> Living near residential green space has also been associated with lower levels of attention deficit hyperactivity disorder.<sup>41</sup> Our funding has helped communities play, explore, learn and connect, by building, modernising and improving access to 683 playgrounds over the past five years.

South Lakeland District Council used our funding to support eight play areas in isolated rural areas with limited public transport and no alternative outdoor facilities. The play areas are operated by different community groups that would individually have found it difficult to get the same level of funding. As well as restoring and replacing old equipment, the funding was used for paving and drainage improvements. This helped ensure the playgrounds, some of which were previously inaccessible during wet winter months, could be used year-round.



Pennies and Pounds  
Make Great Playgrounds

In some cases, however, people of all ages choose to spend time in outdoor spaces that are not designated for public recreation. Playing Out encourages the temporary use of residential streets for safe outdoor play, effectively reclaiming them for community use. The group used our funding to work with 182 local authorities to put a play street policy in place or begin working towards one, and with 339 new communities to plan temporary road closures for play street events.

The benefits of this are clear, with Playing Out finding that children are up to five times more active during a play street event than on a normal school day, and 76% of parents reporting that the events improved their children’s physical health. There are also communal benefits, with 89% of people reporting that they felt a greater sense of belonging to their neighbourhood through play street events.

## Parks for People

A joint initiative between The National Lottery Community Fund and The National Lottery Heritage Fund, the Parks for People programme ran from 2006 to 2020 and awarded over £350 million to more than 200 projects across the UK.<sup>42</sup> The programme funded the regeneration of public parks for the benefit of local communities, with over 50% of the funding going to the 20% most deprived parts of the country.

By the interim point of the programme, funded parks had seen an increase of 3.7 million annual visits and over three years the number of park volunteers increased from 3,400 to 6,500. Grants also funded the restoration of 87 buildings and 215 historical features, with 28 buildings successfully removed from at-risk registers.<sup>43</sup>

A 2020 evaluation of the programme's impact found that, after starting to use a funded park, 56% of people saw an increase in physical activity and 58% experienced improved mental health. A significant proportion of people also found their feelings of isolation reduced (38%) and their ability to affect local decision making increased (34%).<sup>44</sup>

Following Parks for People restoration, Grosvenor and Hilbert Park in Tunbridge Wells has a range of events and activities that bring people together. The park hosts an annual Love Parks Week picnic with attendance around 200, an annual dog show which attracts over 100 entries, and a café and meeting space that runs quiz nights, yoga classes and singing events. Friends of Grosvenor and Hilbert, a group that formed to oppose the construction of roads and houses on land in the park, has 102 members and 30 regular volunteers, committing up to 1,800 hours of unpaid time every year to help maintain and improve the space.<sup>45</sup>



Pennies and Pounds  
Make Great Playgrounds

## Allotments and community gardens

Throughout much of human history, our chief relationship with the natural world has been in harnessing the food it provides. On a day-to-day basis in the UK, this is now mostly seen in large-scale farming in the countryside, but urban food growing spaces close to where people live play an increasingly important role in modern life. Research has found, for example, that community gardens provide mental health and wellbeing benefits through increased interaction with nature, as well as through outdoor physical activity and social contact.<sup>46</sup>

We've supported communities to grow food and flowers while growing closer together through 3,409 allotment and community garden projects in the past five years. We also support the benefits of community growing through large-scale funding for programmes such as Incredible Edible (see below), and through direct small grants to community groups working at grassroots level.

For example, in East Sussex, Bonners Primary School used a £9,950 grant to develop a new allotment space. Prior to the funding, the village of Maresfield only had two public meeting places – a church and a village hall. With both venues closed due to COVID-19, older community members and children were feeling increasingly isolated and anxious. The new community allotment gave people a safe outdoor space to come together around growing food, with strengthened intergenerational ties through older residents teaching young people about horticulture and planting.

## Incredible Edible

**Established in 2012, the Incredible Edible network works to embed local food growing projects in communities across the UK. From growing food on small patches of common land to town-wide edible plant trails, the programme encourages learning and community engagement through local food.**

Our UK Portfolio has awarded the Incredible Edible network over £400,000 to support the organisation's central functions, help it to build partnerships (for example with clinical commissioning groups and local authorities), and grow the network of groups.

We've also directly supported almost 20 projects associated with the Incredible Edible network across the country with more than £300,000 in smaller grants. For example, we gave Incredible Edible Llandrindod in Powys £6,400 to develop a disused tennis court into an outdoor community growing space by adding raised beds for fruit and veg, a border for edible shrubs, and plants to encourage pollinators.

The network now has 144 groups with an average of 42 volunteers each, which grow food on 16,744m<sup>2</sup> of land (up from 7,129m<sup>2</sup> in 2017). Between 2018 and 2020 groups put in 88 years of combined time, held 348 gatherings to bring their communities together around food growing, and went to 309 events to spread awareness of the benefits of a local food culture.<sup>47</sup>

Community growing projects also have a role to play in modern food systems, with small-scale community urban agriculture increasingly seen as a potential solution to food supplies being stretched by population growth and concentration.<sup>48</sup> A 2020 study found that growing fruit and vegetables in 10% of a city's urban green spaces could provide 15% of the population with the recommended five portions per day.<sup>49</sup> Our funding helps to unlock these spaces, supporting communities to move towards self-sufficiency and become healthier at the same time.

**52%** of our grants go towards improving community assets/infrastructure or saving amenities from closure. Of these, **34%** lead to new or improved outdoor spaces and better access to them.<sup>50</sup>

Westray Development Trust used a grant of £16,800 to purchase a plot of land on the Orkney island of Westray to use for community food growing. Within 95 days of planting the first seeds, the group was able to supply local shops with organic tomatoes. The project now supplies fresh produce to all three shops on the island, and was selected by Highlands and Islands Enterprise to be part of a feasibility study into vertical farming systems.

The garden, which is mostly self-sufficient, also grows onions, radishes, lettuce, broccoli and courgettes, and supplies high-end microgreens to the Scottish mainland to generate profits that subsidise local sales. Following community consultation, strawberries and raspberries were added to the repertoire, as commercial imports of these products are often badly damaged due to the significant distance they have to travel.

## Getting involved

Feedback from participants on the front line is vital in confirming that the community growing projects we fund are making a real difference to people's lives and mental health:

**"If I wasn't working at the farm I would be at home, feeling lonely. You build confidence from mixing with different people and helping the community – you feel like part of something."**

Calon Farm For All

**"It's medicinal. If you don't have things like this, you'll get depressed, and low, and end up in hospital and that will cost them a fortune. They need things like this to keep people going."**

Older People's Community Gardening Group

**"My self belief was very low before joining. I now see I can do things, I feel happier and calmer, and my mental health is so much improved. It's been transformational."**

Windmill Community Gardens

**"Taking part has helped me be outside and be in nature. It has made me feel calmer and more connected with the world, and broadened the range of people I meet every day."**

Plot 22

## Outdoor activities

Even prior to the COVID-19 pandemic increasing use of outdoor spaces, there was growing policy interest in the community, wellbeing and economic benefits they offer. The government's 2018 Loneliness Strategy, for example, highlighted the importance of outdoor community spaces and green spaces in particular,<sup>51</sup> while the 2019 Healthy New Towns programme by the NHS noted that multi-functional green spaces are key to the wellbeing of neighbourhoods.<sup>52</sup> In recognition of this, working with The National Lottery Heritage Fund, we commissioned an evidence review of the benefits of outdoor spaces, both for people and for communities.<sup>53</sup>

Of the report's main conclusions, the first was that outdoor green spaces should be seen as social infrastructure, not just physical infrastructure. "This means that as well as investing in and maintaining high quality physical environments," the report explains, "funders should also support the activities that animate green spaces and encourage people to use them." We've invested almost £200 million in line with this over the past five years, helping people to make practical use of the outdoors through activities that help them develop their skills, participate in community life, and improve their mental and physical health.

Incredible Edible volunteers put in a combined **88 years of time** from 2018 to 2020 to grow food on 16,744m<sup>2</sup> of land.

## Skills and community participation

Outdoor skills education, according to research, has the potential to connect people with nature and wider social networks, as well as providing "positive connections with the self".<sup>54</sup> There are particular benefits for children and young people, with outdoor adventure education boosting interpersonal groupwork skills.<sup>55</sup> We have awarded a range of smaller grants to provide safe places for children to experience and learn about the outdoors, including £10,000 for the Survive Squad project in Scunthorpe. The project runs bushcraft survival camps for children aged 8-12, teaching outdoor skills such as fire lighting, cooking and working in a team.

Outdoor skills can also serve as a platform to address needs not immediately related to outdoor spaces. For example, alongside education in life skills such as financial literacy, the Centre for Building Social Action in Llanelli teaches young people about healthy eating through growing their own food in a community garden, with the end goal of helping them to develop new skills and independence to increase their chances of a more secure life. The organisation has now involved over 50 young residents in community growing, leading to training in healthy food preparation that connects outdoor skills to a holistic approach to healthy living.



**“All you need for an outdoor space to have an impact is a few benches and a couple of flowers. Even one plant in a little indent somewhere can make a difference.”**

Ruth Tyler  
Folkestone Youth Project

This type of training also brings people together.<sup>56</sup> A study by the University of Essex measured this, finding that 95% of participants in the research with a low sense of wellbeing who volunteered outdoors just once per week reported improved mental health within six weeks.<sup>57</sup> The Shettleston Community Growing Project in Glasgow used a £127,000 grant to run a community growing and volunteering initiative, bringing together over 2,000 residents to learn new skills and encouraging 190 people to volunteer. Alongside individual volunteers, participants were referred from local carers' organisations, jobseekers' services and women's centres.

Individual stories from the project include one volunteer with Asperger's syndrome, who initially attended with his support worker and was very quiet and reserved. Over time, as he learned more about growing and tending the garden, he started attending sessions on his own and began initiating conversations, despite having previously found it difficult to make friends. After six weeks he asked for, and was given, a plot of his own, and took care of it alongside continuing to volunteer. He now continues to look after his plot and maintain relationships with other volunteers, even though he has started a work placement

elsewhere. His support worker noted that, after taking part in the project, he was a completely different person, with improved diet, confidence and social skills.

In other projects, the link between outdoor spaces and skills is less obvious, but no less impactful. Through the Create Your Space programme, Ynysybwl Regeneration Partnership near Pontypridd took control of Butcher's Pool, a local outdoor swimming pool that has been community-run since 2014. Funding paid for essential repairs, including pump house refurbishment, new drains and filters, remodelled changing rooms, new toilets, new pipework, and new safety surfaces. Following this work in 2019, the summer season saw 2,500 visits to the pool and 700 hours of volunteer time donated, with nine local young people employed as lifeguards and 10 volunteers trained as lifeguards, building skills that boost their employability, safety and physical health.



Shettleston Community  
Growing Project

## A Better Start



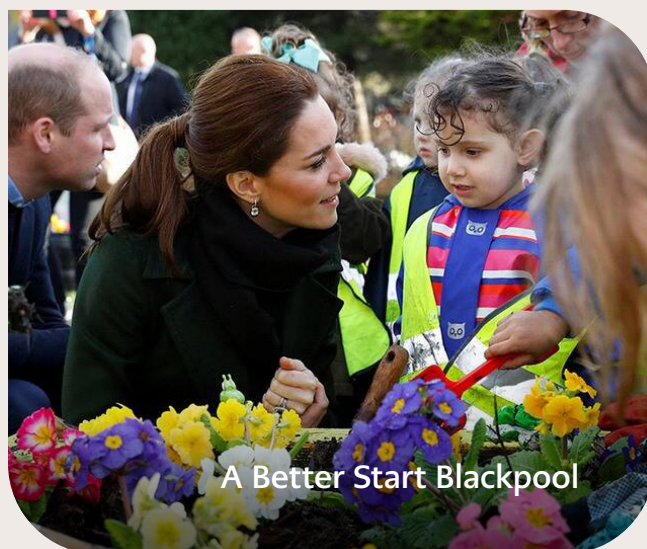
A Better Start is a **10-year investment of £215 million** to improve the life chances of children aged 0-3 in Blackpool, Bradford, Lambeth, Nottingham and Southend.

Our A Better Start programme has four main aims, with outdoor spaces playing a role in the objectives of helping children to develop social and emotional skills, and bringing about systems change to improve local public services.



A Better Start Bradford

In Bradford, the Better Place project is improving local parks and outdoor spaces, aiming to provide a healthier and happier environment for babies, young children and families. This includes natural play areas in parks, playgrounds and woodlands, toddler-friendly walking routes, and tree planting in gardens and parks through the Festival of Trees (featured on BBC Countryfile). The project has also put in place a pilot scheme at 10 schools to improve air quality and make streets safer, more attractive routes to walk, using road closures, walking bus services and restricted parking.



A Better Start Blackpool

In Blackpool, £1.6m of the funding has been dedicated to the redevelopment of parks and open spaces to encourage families to play outdoors with their young children. Community consultation led the design of each space, so each met local needs. Revoe Park is an example of this. Previously overgrown and under-used, it had become the focus of antisocial behaviour and families didn't feel safe using it. It has now been transformed – there's a natural play area for young children, dedicated dog walking routes, a community garden and a community workshop. It is now well-used, with local residents taking pride in helping to tend the garden and look after the space.

## Health and social prescribing

Over the past five years, our funding has helped communities to improve their fitness in the fresh air through building, renovating and making better use of 224 outdoor gyms, 301 sports pitches and 49 footpaths. While the wellbeing benefits of outdoor exercise are important for everyone in society, they may be of particular benefit to those with long-term physical or mental health conditions. This can best be observed through social prescribing projects, i.e. those that offer services for people with long-term health needs who are referred for non-medical interventions delivered within the community.

Outdoor spaces are key to many social prescription options, as noted in work around the NHS Long Term Plan.<sup>58</sup> Through a £493,000 grant, Urban Biodiversity's Newquay Community Orchard project supports people with health needs alongside those struggling with unemployment or

economic hardship. Following an initial assessment, the project creates structured programmes for participants, focusing on their interests, needs and goals. People might find themselves planting trees, growing and harvesting vegetables, or helping to maintain the seven-acre site.

Over just three years, the project had 469 participants, of whom 95% improved their mental wellbeing and 98% increased their physical activity and health. Showing the specific social prescription benefits of the project as an alternative to medical care, 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.

**“Being active in an outdoor setting, for example taking part in a nature walk, takes people’s attention away from what they’re doing. It’s health by stealth and exercise in disguise!”**

Ian Thomas  
Gwent Wildlife Trust



As well as targeted interventions, linking health outcomes to nature can also take the form of more holistic connections between people and outdoor spaces, to the benefit of both. Avon Wildlife Trust used a National Lottery Community Fund grant to support people with mental health issues and learning disabilities by giving them opportunities to explore and care for local nature. As a result, people have helped out at an allotment, planted trees, cleaned up local parks, learned to cook outdoors and gone on nature walks. They've also learned about nature, for example through a session on the role of pollinators from conservation organisation Buglife.

Nine out of ten participants (89%) reported improved health and wellbeing, with the vast majority (94%) reporting an increased connection to nature, demonstrating the two-way benefits of the project for individuals and natural outdoor spaces. Avon Wildlife Trust also ran awareness days for practitioners to demonstrate the treatment value of working in nature and learning outdoor skills, including for medical students at Bristol University, local GPs and NHS Bristol's Head Injury Therapy Unit. Of those who attended these sessions and related nature connection days for the community, 92% felt they were more aware of the benefits nature has on wellbeing.



# Access to the outdoors

Benefiting from most of the advantages of outdoor spaces explored in this report is dependent on being able to access them. While the UK has abundant natural and developed outdoor spaces, we know that access to them is not equal.<sup>59</sup>

In 2021, the United Nations Human Rights Council officially recognised having a clean, healthy and sustainable environment as a human right,<sup>60</sup> and there is also an ongoing global movement to recognise access to nature as a human right.<sup>61</sup> In combination with the COVID-19 pandemic reinforcing the importance of being able to be outside,<sup>62</sup> it's clear that providing access to outdoor spaces is a key duty of the public and civil society sectors.



We've invested **£6.6 million** over the past five years to provide outdoor access, helping communities to overcome – among other areas – the financial, cultural and practical barriers to accessing outdoor spaces.

## Access to Nature

**A five-year funding programme awarding £28.7 million, Access to Nature improved people's awareness of, access to and engagement with the natural environment.**

The funding helped give 640,000 people an improved understanding of nature and how people's actions affect it, and improved almost 2,800 natural places and access to them. More than 811,000 people benefited from these changes.

One of the programme's main outcomes was for more people to be able to enjoy the natural environment through investment in access to natural places and networks between sites. Of the 115 projects funded through Access to Nature, 60 worked to provide this, improving physical infrastructure such as footpaths, signs and overgrown vegetation.

The Wyke Beck Valley Pride project in Leeds sought to make Wyke Beck and its associated natural spaces accessible to disadvantaged local communities. Improvements put in place by the project included 2,700m of improved footpaths, 120m of new fencing, and a bridge installation. In Cornwall, Where the Wild Things Grow installed trail maps and notice boards to help people navigate and learn more about local parks, trails and nature reserves.

## Economic inequality

Natural England's 2019 Monitor of Engagement with the Natural Environment found that, compared with those in more affluent areas, a lower proportion of children living in deprived areas: spent time outside on a frequent basis; spent time outside with adults; or visited urban green spaces, the coast or the countryside.<sup>63</sup> There is a risk of this inequality becoming cyclical, with research finding that adults' modelling of green space use and their stories based on positive memories of being outdoors help young people build confidence and cultural access to nature.<sup>64</sup> This means those who don't access outdoor spaces as children are less likely to pass confidence and knowledge of the outdoors to the next generation.

Connswater Community Greenway added **16km of foot/cycle paths**, built/improved **26 bridges and crossings**, and cleaned **5km of rivers** in Belfast, with a return on investment of up to £6 for every £1 invested.

The One Planet Pioneers project, run through Our Bright Future, addresses the root causes of this issue. Between 2016 and 2020, the project taught nearly 2,800 young people from disadvantaged areas in Teesside practical outdoor skills such as tree felling, coppicing, wildflower grassland management and vegetable growing. Over 50% of participants have gone on to start employment, volunteering, apprenticeships or paid training, demonstrating the project's economic value to an area that has recently experienced above-average levels of unemployment.<sup>65</sup> This has the potential

to help to break the generational cycle of inexperience with outdoor spaces too, as young people who are comfortable and confident spending time outdoors will have abundant cultural capital to pass on.

**“Outdoor spaces benefit young people in ways they don't even realise, like brain development and building negotiation skills. But access isn't equal – some young people just can't afford for their one pair of shoes to get muddy.”**

Dan Raven-Ellison  
Slow Ways

## Cultural sensitivity

A related aspect to economic inequality in terms of access to outdoor spaces is the different cultural make-up of areas around the UK. Statistics for England confirm that minority ethnic communities are more likely to live in the most deprived areas,<sup>66</sup> compounding lack of access through twin factors in cases where people feel less of a connection to outdoor spaces<sup>67</sup> or where they feel less welcome, as has been found to be the case in the countryside in particular.<sup>68</sup>

**“Minority ethnic communities or less privileged communities can feel that outdoor spaces are the preserve of the white middle classes. Groups like Muslim Hikers are working to improve this, but need capacity building support to help them grow.”**

Charlie Simpson  
Youth Hostels Association

We fund projects that address this imbalance, finding ways to facilitate and encourage access to outdoor spaces for minority ethnic communities. For example, Students and Refugees Together used a £9,000 award to run walking groups in Plymouth. The groups bring together refugees and local students, helping those new to their community meet people and practice their English in an informal setting. The project was featured in a BBC Radio 4 documentary which saw Clare Balding interview participants and founder Avril Bellinger to learn more about the benefits

of using nature as a vehicle to grow confidence and build new connections.<sup>69</sup>

As well as accessing existing spaces, however, access can also be a question of having an outdoor space you feel is ‘your own’, whether that’s from an individual or community perspective. We supported Room to Heal, a London-based charity, to use gardening as a form of therapy for refugees and asylum seekers who have experienced torture, helping them manage symptoms of abuse and improve their overall wellbeing through access to a safe outdoor space. The project was born out of a group of refugees’ desire for a green space of their own to grow food, eat together and feel a sense of belonging with their surroundings.

## Connswater Community Greenway



Connswater Community Greenway is a **£40 million** project, of which **£23.6 million** came from the Fund through the Living Landmarks programme, to create a **9km 'linear park'** through East Belfast.

The project has put in place 16km of footpaths and cycle paths, built or improved 26 bridges and crossings, cleaned 5km of rivers, and put in place a wildlife corridor, among other developments. Prior to the project commencing, the social return on investment was estimated between £2 and £6 for every £1 invested, due to increased land value, improved health, greater employment, a boost in tourism and mitigation of the effects of climate change.<sup>70</sup>

The 10-year process of developing the greenway saw 32,378 local people and 32 schools engaged, with 452 different events and activities supporting this, such as opening events for public squares and volunteer gardening projects. The project

also saw 6,780 volunteer hours committed, with an estimated value of £46,516. As well as providing a transformative improvement in outdoor spaces and access to the outdoors for Belfast residents, the greenway has gone some way to addressing East Belfast's history of severe flooding, putting in place defences that have protected 1,700 properties.<sup>71</sup>

This work also improved the local environment, with the Connswater, Knock and Loop rivers previously being in a neglected state with an ecological status of 'poor', which has since improved to 'moderate'. In recognition of the scale of the work and its social and environmental impact, the greenway was selected as one of the world's 200 most influential projects by the Institution of Civil Engineers.<sup>72</sup>



Connswater Community Greenway



## Practical barriers

Across all economic and cultural spheres, there are practical barriers to accessing outdoor spaces, including disability and age-related health conditions. Dementia, while far from the only condition or need to fall within these categories, serves as a good example to demonstrate this point. Dementia costs the UK economy more than heart disease and cancer combined,<sup>73</sup> and there are well-documented benefits to spending time in outdoor spaces for people with dementia,<sup>74</sup> including overall health and wellbeing.<sup>75</sup> In spite of this, it remains practically difficult for people with dementia to access the outdoors, due – among other reasons – to safety concerns, transport availability and the need for carer support.<sup>76</sup>

Dementia Adventure works to educate families, carers, health practitioners and people with dementia about the benefits of spending time in outdoor spaces, and how to overcome the barriers. We provided £498,000 to the group for a project that delivered 913 activity sessions, including nature walks, group gardening sessions, farm activities, garden visits, beach visits and woodland walks.

Overall, 2,490 people with dementia and 582 carers attended, with average ages of 80 and 60 respectively. The project also offered training to health practitioners and carers, delivered in part by people with dementia, with 44 sessions attracting 64 people to learn to become more confident about making use of outdoor spaces in dementia care and treatment.

Of the **52%** of our grants that go towards improving community assets/ infrastructure or saving amenities from closure each year, **32%** lead to safer and more welcoming spaces, which includes adding benches, better lighting and resurfaced paths.<sup>77</sup>

More generally, too, one of the impacts of ageing can be isolation, resulting in reduced contact with outdoor spaces even for those who live close to nature. We gave Future Roots £370,000 for the Countrymen's Club project, which works with older men facing rural isolation and illness, building their resilience through 'care farming'. Care farming provides a bespoke, supervised, structured programme of farm-related activity, enabling older residents to make a meaningful contribution to the running of a farm. They might be involved in animal care, land management, taking care of flowers, or growing vegetables.

A project evaluation found that Countrymen's Club attendees appreciated having a purpose to go outside and meet people in a context in which they weren't defined by their health conditions. The physical nature of farm work also meant they became much more active, marking a break from a sedentary lifestyle. Carers were also very positive about both the impact on attendees and the crucial free time they were afforded by knowing their care recipients were enjoying themselves in a safe setting.

## Looking ahead

Comprising the natural habitats of all life on Earth, it would be trite to say that outdoor spaces matter now any more than they ever did. However, in a more recent sense, given the accelerating rate of climate change and the post-COP26 and COVID-19 context, it's hard to deny a revival in appreciation for nature, parks, gardens and other outdoor spaces, and an increasing desire to protect them. Looking ahead, it is this context that will define community-focused work around outdoor spaces.

**“We need to start conceiving of childhoods not just as periods of time, but as places. Like considering what you might want in your neighbourhood, what do we want in every child’s childhood? How can we map what’s inside those childhoods and secure what’s needed? This could help us shape the outdoor spaces we need.”**

Dan Raven-Ellison  
Slow Ways

As well as flexible funding programmes that can respond organically to changing societal priorities, we also have specific programmes in place to address this shift. The Climate Action Fund is a 10-year programme with a £100 million budget, focused on supporting communities to take action on climate change. The most recent funding round targeted waste and

consumption, but outdoor spaces featured prominently in the first round in 2020, which saw over £19.5 million awarded to 23 projects across the UK.

For example, Calderdale Metropolitan Borough Council is working to grow sphagnum moss on local peat bogs, turning an unused outdoor space into a powerful natural asset in the fight against climate change by harnessing its carbon capture potential.<sup>78</sup> In Derry/Londonderry, Acorn Farm is upskilling local people to grow their own food and is working to build a food growing hub, providing a shared outdoor space for healthy, climate-positive activities that boost wellbeing.

In September 2021, we also launched Together for Our Planet, a community climate action programme awarding grants of £1,000 to £10,000 to support local environmental projects. This will particularly help to nurture community-level ideas, with food and the natural environment – both of which revolve around outdoor spaces – among the key areas of focus for the programme.

Through these forward-looking approaches and the existing work detailed in this report, The National Lottery Community Fund is well-positioned to support a surge of interest in outdoor spaces. It will be down to communities themselves to shape what this looks like, but we are ready to help them make an equitable, outdoor-focused future a reality across the UK.

## Endnotes

- 1 Office for National Statistics (2021) How has lockdown changed our relationship with nature? [ons.gov.uk/economy/environmentalaccounts/articles/howhaslockdownchangedourrelationshipwithnature/2021-04-26](https://ons.gov.uk/economy/environmentalaccounts/articles/howhaslockdownchangedourrelationshipwithnature/2021-04-26) [online, accessed 01 Oct 2021]
- 2 P White et al (2019) Spending at least 120 minutes a week in nature is associated with good health and wellbeing [nature.com/articles/s41598-019-44097-3](https://nature.com/articles/s41598-019-44097-3)
- 3 Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (2013) Connecting with nature [rspb.org.uk/Images/connecting-with-nature\\_tcm9-354603.pdf](https://rspb.org.uk/Images/connecting-with-nature_tcm9-354603.pdf)
- 4 A Hunt et al (2016) Monitor of engagement with the natural environment (March 2013 to February 2015) [assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/498944/mene-childrens-report-years-1-2.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/498944/mene-childrens-report-years-1-2.pdf)
- 5 Office for National Statistics (2021) How has lockdown changed our relationship with nature? [ons.gov.uk/economy/environmentalaccounts/articles/howhaslockdownchangedourrelationshipwithnature/2021-04-26](https://ons.gov.uk/economy/environmentalaccounts/articles/howhaslockdownchangedourrelationshipwithnature/2021-04-26) [online, accessed 01 Oct 2021]
- 6 B Collier (2020) The race factor in access to green space [runnymedetrust.org/blog/the-race-factor-in-access-to-green-space](https://runnymedetrust.org/blog/the-race-factor-in-access-to-green-space) [online, accessed 03 Oct 2021]
- 7 R O'Neill (2019) Monitor of engagement with the natural environment – the national survey on people and the natural environment [assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/828552/Monitor\\_Engagement\\_Natural\\_Environment\\_2018\\_2019\\_v2.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/828552/Monitor_Engagement_Natural_Environment_2018_2019_v2.pdf)
- 8 A Hunt et al (2016) Monitor of engagement with the natural environment (March 2013 to February 2015) [assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/498944/mene-childrens-report-years-1-2.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/498944/mene-childrens-report-years-1-2.pdf)
- 9 Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust (2017) The impact of school visits to WWT Wetland Centres on pupil attitudes to nature [wwt.org.uk/uploads/documents/2019-04-18/1555577388-wwt-school-visit-research-final-report.pdf](https://wwt.org.uk/uploads/documents/2019-04-18/1555577388-wwt-school-visit-research-final-report.pdf)
- 10 UK Parliament (1993) National Lottery Act [legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1993/39/contents](https://legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1993/39/contents)
- 11 M Winterbotham et al (2021) The National Lottery Community Fund impact research report [tnlcommunityfund.org.uk/media/insights/documents/Exploring-the-impact-of-grant-funding.pdf](https://tnlcommunityfund.org.uk/media/insights/documents/Exploring-the-impact-of-grant-funding.pdf)
- 12 M Winterbotham et al (2021) The National Lottery Community Fund impact research report [tnlcommunityfund.org.uk/media/insights/documents/Exploring-the-impact-of-grant-funding.pdf](https://tnlcommunityfund.org.uk/media/insights/documents/Exploring-the-impact-of-grant-funding.pdf)
- 13 Unless otherwise referenced, all data and information in this report comes from grant holder reports or National Lottery Community Fund internal sources.

14 Unless otherwise referenced, all data and information in this report comes from grant holder reports or National Lottery Community Fund internal sources.

15 Keywords used to search grant records for natural outdoor spaces: woodland, forest, lake, waterway, coastland, green space, blue space, nature reserve, open space, natural space, grass, grassland, countryside, common land. Keywords used to search grant records for developed outdoor spaces: park, allotment, garden, sensory garden, canal, orchard, outdoor gym, green gym, playing field, outdoor theatre, community square, town square, village square, village green, town green, playground, skate park, multi-use games area, multi use games area, MUGA, football pitch, rugby pitch, cricket pitch, sports pitch, tennis court, 5-a-side pitch, five-a-side pitch, 5 a side pitch, five a side pitch, sculpture park, outdoor art, recreation ground, city farm, farmland, campsite, picnic table, greenway, pond. Keywords used to search grant records for outdoor activities: food growing, tree planting, outdoor exercise, litter picking, moss planting, outdoor festival, outdoor art, outdoor activities, outdoor activity, landscaping, gardening, walking group, camping, boat, barge, sailing, outdoor swimming, wild swimming, rewilding, forest school, outdoor learning, bug hotel, insect hotel, Duke of Edinburgh. Keywords used to search grant records for outdoor access: cycle path, footpath, canal path, towpath, countryside access, access to nature, make nature more accessible, access to the outdoors, right of way, BAME access to the countryside, BAME access to the outdoors, disabled access to the countryside, disabled access to the outdoors.

16 'Overall investment' does not equal cumulative totals due to projects overlapping multiple categories.

17 Figures relate to the number of grants funded for each set of keywords. Keywords used to search grant records: woodlands (woodland, forest); lakes and waterways (pond, waterway, canal, river, lake); playgrounds (playground); parks (village green, town green, common land, park, green space); allotments and community gardens (allotment, garden); footpaths (foot path, footpath, towpath, canal path); outdoor gyms (green gym, outdoor gym); sports fields (playing field, multi-use games area, MUGA, multi use games area, cricket pitch, football pitch, rugby pitch, sports pitch, tennis court, 5-a-side pitch, five-a-side pitch, 5 a side pitch, five a side pitch). The figure related to urban public parks comes from The National Lottery Heritage Fund (2020) [heritagefund.org.uk/publications/parks-people-why-should-we-invest-parks](https://heritagefund.org.uk/publications/parks-people-why-should-we-invest-parks)

18 Figures based on the number of grants in a keyword search of grant records. See previous endnote.

19 G Bratman et al (2015) Nature experience reduces rumination and subgenual prefrontal cortex activation [pnas.org/content/112/28/8567.abstract](https://pnas.org/content/112/28/8567.abstract)

20 M French (2016) Evaluation of the Scottish Land Fund 2012-16 [gov.scot/publications/evaluation-scottish-land-fund-2012-16/](https://gov.scot/publications/evaluation-scottish-land-fund-2012-16/)

21 M McFarlane et al (2021) Scottish Land Fund: Evaluation [gov.scot/publications/scottish-land-fund-evaluation/](https://gov.scot/publications/scottish-land-fund-evaluation/)

- 22 N Weinstein et al (2015) Seeing community for the trees: the links among contact with natural environments, community cohesion, and crime [academic.oup.com/bioscience/article/65/12/1141/223866](https://academic.oup.com/bioscience/article/65/12/1141/223866)
- 23 L O'Brien et al (2012) Exploring relationships between peri-urban woodlands and people's health and well-being [forestresearch.gov.uk/documents/1420/Peri-urban\\_woods\\_and\\_health\\_report\\_2012.pdf](https://forestresearch.gov.uk/documents/1420/Peri-urban_woods_and_health_report_2012.pdf)
- 24 M Winterbotham et al (2021) The National Lottery Community Fund impact research report [tnlcommunityfund.org.uk/media/insights/documents/Exploring-the-impact-of-grant-funding.pdf](https://tnlcommunityfund.org.uk/media/insights/documents/Exploring-the-impact-of-grant-funding.pdf)
- 25 J Luttik (2012) The value of trees, water and open space as reflected by house prices in the Netherlands [research.wur.nl/en/publications/the-value-of-trees-water-and-open-space-as-reflected-by-house-pri](https://research.wur.nl/en/publications/the-value-of-trees-water-and-open-space-as-reflected-by-house-pri)
- 26 Confor (2014) Eskdalemuir: a comparison of forestry and hill farming; productivity and economic impact [confor.org.uk/media/246147/33\\_eskdalemuirreportmay2014.pdf](https://confor.org.uk/media/246147/33_eskdalemuirreportmay2014.pdf)
- 27 R Wrigley (2021) Rewilding and the rural economy [s3.eu-west-2.amazonaws.com/assets.rewildingbritain.org.uk/documents/nature-based-economies-rewilding-britain.pdf](https://s3.eu-west-2.amazonaws.com/assets.rewildingbritain.org.uk/documents/nature-based-economies-rewilding-britain.pdf)
- 28 Make UK (2021) Unlocking the skills needed for a digital and green future [makeuk.org/insights/reports/unlocking-the-skills-needed-for-a-digital-and-green-future](https://makeuk.org/insights/reports/unlocking-the-skills-needed-for-a-digital-and-green-future)
- 29 H Hudson et al (2021) Our Bright Future mid-term evaluation [ourbrightfuture.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/08/Mid-Term-Evaluation-Final-Report.pdf](https://ourbrightfuture.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/08/Mid-Term-Evaluation-Final-Report.pdf)
- 30 W Eadson et al (2019) Green Leaders summary report [groundwork.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/Green-Leaders-summary-reportFinal.pdf](https://groundwork.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/Green-Leaders-summary-reportFinal.pdf)
- 31 Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (2021) Statistical digest of rural England – population [assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/1028819/Rural\\_population\\_Oct\\_2021.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1028819/Rural_population_Oct_2021.pdf)
- 32 Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (2021) National planning policy framework [assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/1005759/NPPF\\_July\\_2021.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1005759/NPPF_July_2021.pdf)
- 33 Office for National Statistics (2019) Urban green spaces raise nearby house prices by an average of £2,500 [ons.gov.uk/economy/environmentalaccounts/articles/urbangreenspacesraisenearbyhousepricesbyanaverageof2500/2019-10-14](https://ons.gov.uk/economy/environmentalaccounts/articles/urbangreenspacesraisenearbyhousepricesbyanaverageof2500/2019-10-14) [online, accessed 04 Nov 2021]
- 34 Land Trust (2018) The economic value of our green spaces [thelandtrust.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/The-economic-value-of-our-green-spaces.pdf](https://thelandtrust.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/The-economic-value-of-our-green-spaces.pdf)
- 35 M Shepley et al (2019) The impact of green space on violent crime in urban environments: an evidence synthesis [pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/31847399/](https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/31847399/)

- 36 Parks Alliance (2020) Making parks count: the case for parks  
[theparksalliance.org/making-parks-count-the-case-for-parks/](https://theparksalliance.org/making-parks-count-the-case-for-parks/)
- 37 W Eadson et al (2020) Why should we invest in parks?  
[heritagefund.org.uk/publications/parks-people-why-should-we-invest-parks](https://heritagefund.org.uk/publications/parks-people-why-should-we-invest-parks)
- 38 H Gardiner (2019) Activate! Land in the hands of communities  
[localtrust.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/local-trust-activate-land-communities.pdf](https://localtrust.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/local-trust-activate-land-communities.pdf)
- 39 Child and Nature Alliance (2017) Position statement on active outdoor play  
[childnature.ca/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/B.-EN-Active-Outdoor-Play-Position-Statement-FINAL-DESIGN.pdf](https://childnature.ca/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/B.-EN-Active-Outdoor-Play-Position-Statement-FINAL-DESIGN.pdf)
- 40 G Bento et al (2017) The importance of outdoor play for young children's healthy development  
[sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S2444866416301234](https://sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S2444866416301234)
- 41 M Thygesen et al (2020) The association between residential green space in childhood and development of attention deficit hyperactivity disorder  
[ehp.niehs.nih.gov/doi/full/10.1289/EHP6729](https://ehp.niehs.nih.gov/doi/full/10.1289/EHP6729)
- 42 National Lottery Community Fund funding was for parks in England only, though the overall programme operated across the UK. The last tranche of awards was made in 2020.
- 43 I Baggott et al (2013) Parks for People impact evaluation  
[tnlcommunityfund.org.uk/media/documents/parks-for-people-impact-evaluation-main-report](https://tnlcommunityfund.org.uk/media/documents/parks-for-people-impact-evaluation-main-report)
- 44 W Eadson et al (2020) Why should we invest in parks?  
[heritagefund.org.uk/publications/parks-people-why-should-we-invest-parks](https://heritagefund.org.uk/publications/parks-people-why-should-we-invest-parks)
- 45 J Dobson (2020) A park for the people: Grosvenor and Hilbert Park, Tunbridge Wells  
[heritagefund.org.uk/sites/default/files/media/attachments/GrosvenorandHilbertstudy.pdf](https://heritagefund.org.uk/sites/default/files/media/attachments/GrosvenorandHilbertstudy.pdf)
- 46 V Shanmuganathan-Felton et al (2020) Cultivating wellbeing and mental health through gardening  
[thepsychologist.bps.org.uk/cultivating-wellbeing-and-mental-health-through-gardening](https://thepsychologist.bps.org.uk/cultivating-wellbeing-and-mental-health-through-gardening) [online, accessed 10 Nov 2021]
- 47 Incredible Edible (2021) Incredible Edible update 2018-2020  
[incredibleedible.org.uk/news/incredible-update-our-2018-2020-report/](https://incredibleedible.org.uk/news/incredible-update-our-2018-2020-report/)
- 48 R McDougall et al (2018) Small-scale urban agriculture results in high yields but requires judicious management of inputs to achieve sustainability  
[pnas.org/content/116/1/129](https://pnas.org/content/116/1/129)
- 49 J Edmondson et al (2020) The hidden potential of urban horticulture  
[nature.com/articles/s43016-020-0045-6](https://nature.com/articles/s43016-020-0045-6)
- 50 M Winterbotham et al (2021) The National Lottery Community Fund impact research report  
[tnlcommunityfund.org.uk/media/insights/documents/Exploring-the-impact-of-grant-funding.pdf](https://tnlcommunityfund.org.uk/media/insights/documents/Exploring-the-impact-of-grant-funding.pdf)
- 51 UK Government (2018) A connected society – a strategy for tackling loneliness  
[gov.uk/government/publications/a-connected-society-a-strategy-for-tackling-loneliness](https://gov.uk/government/publications/a-connected-society-a-strategy-for-tackling-loneliness)

- 52 NHS England (2019) Healthy new towns [england.nhs.uk/ourwork/innovation/healthy-new-towns/](https://england.nhs.uk/ourwork/innovation/healthy-new-towns/)
- 53 J Dobson et al (2020) Space to thrive [heritagefund.org.uk/publications/space-thrive](https://heritagefund.org.uk/publications/space-thrive)
- 54 J Cottrell et al (2020) Outdoor skills education: what are the benefits for health, learning and lifestyle? [tandfonline.com/doi/abs](https://tandfonline.com/doi/abs)
- 55 S Cooley et al (2016) Using outdoor adventure education to develop students groupwork skills [researchgate.net/publication/308389569\\_Using\\_Outdoor\\_Adventure\\_Education\\_to\\_Develop\\_Students\\_Groupwork\\_Skills\\_A\\_Quantitative\\_Exploration\\_of\\_Reaction\\_and\\_Learning](https://researchgate.net/publication/308389569_Using_Outdoor_Adventure_Education_to_Develop_Students_Groupwork_Skills_A_Quantitative_Exploration_of_Reaction_and_Learning)
- 56 V Jennings et al (2019) The relationship between social cohesion and urban green space: an avenue for health promotion [ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC6388234/](https://ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC6388234/)
- 57 M Rogerson et al (2017) The health and wellbeing impacts of volunteering with the Wildlife Trusts [wildlifetrusts.org/news/new-report-links-volunteering-nature-better-mental-health](https://wildlifetrusts.org/news/new-report-links-volunteering-nature-better-mental-health)
- 58 NHS England (2021) Green social prescribing [england.nhs.uk/personalisedcare/social-prescribing/green-social-prescribing/](https://england.nhs.uk/personalisedcare/social-prescribing/green-social-prescribing/) [online, accessed 02 Dec 2021]
- 59 F Holland (2021) Out of bounds: equity in access to urban nature [groundwork.org.uk/about-groundwork/reports/outofbounds/](https://groundwork.org.uk/about-groundwork/reports/outofbounds/)
- 60 United Nations (2021) Access to a healthy environment declared a human right by UN rights council [news.un.org/en/story/2021/10/1102582](https://news.un.org/en/story/2021/10/1102582) [online, accessed 06 Dec 2021]
- 61 Nature is a Human Right (2021) What we do [natureisahumanright.earth/about](https://natureisahumanright.earth/about) [online, accessed 06 Dec 2021]
- 62 G Hubbard et al (2021) Are rurality, area deprivation, access to outside space and green space associated with mental health during the Covid-19 pandemic? [pure.ed.ac.uk/ws/portalfiles/portal/205178862/HubbardEtalJERPH2021IsRuralityArea.pdf](https://pure.ed.ac.uk/ws/portalfiles/portal/205178862/HubbardEtalJERPH2021IsRuralityArea.pdf)
- 63 R O'Neill (2019) Monitor of engagement with the natural environment – children and young people report [assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/828838/Monitor\\_of\\_Engagement\\_with\\_the\\_Natural\\_Environment\\_MENE\\_Childrens\\_Report\\_2018-2019\\_rev.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/828838/Monitor_of_Engagement_with_the_Natural_Environment_MENE_Childrens_Report_2018-2019_rev.pdf)
- 64 J Birch et al (2019) Supporting young people's mental health – how urban nature can help [iwun.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/IWUN-Practice-Document-young-people-ARTWORK-A4-8pp.pdf](https://iwun.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/IWUN-Practice-Document-young-people-ARTWORK-A4-8pp.pdf)
- 65 Local Government Association (2021) A responsive employment and skills partnership – Tees Valley Combined Authority [local.gov.uk/case-studies/responsive-employment-and-skills-partnership-tees-valley-combined-authority](https://local.gov.uk/case-studies/responsive-employment-and-skills-partnership-tees-valley-combined-authority) [online, accessed 13 Dec 2021]

- 66 UK Government (2020) People living in deprived neighbourhoods [ethnicity-facts-figures.service.gov.uk/uk-population-by-ethnicity/demographics/people-living-in-deprived-neighbourhoods/latest](https://ethnicity-facts-figures.service.gov.uk/uk-population-by-ethnicity/demographics/people-living-in-deprived-neighbourhoods/latest) [online, accessed 13 Dec 2021]
- 67 Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (2018) Landscapes review [assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/833726/landscapes-review-final-report.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/833726/landscapes-review-final-report.pdf)
- 68 University of Leicester (2012) Compelling evidence highlights racism in rural areas [le.ac.uk/ebulletin-archive/ebulletin/news/press-releases/2000-2009/2004/10/nparticle-59d-xp4-s3c.html](https://le.ac.uk/ebulletin-archive/ebulletin/news/press-releases/2000-2009/2004/10/nparticle-59d-xp4-s3c.html) [online, accessed 14 Dec 2021]
- 69 BBC Radio 4 (2017) Ramblings – series 35: Mount Edgcumbe, Plymouth [bbc.co.uk/sounds/play/b08k4bxw](https://bbc.co.uk/sounds/play/b08k4bxw)
- 70 R Hunter et al (2017) Social return on investment analysis of an urban greenway [conswatergreenway.co.uk/sites/default/files/Hunter\\_SROI\\_Cities&Health\\_accepted.pdf](https://conswatergreenway.co.uk/sites/default/files/Hunter_SROI_Cities&Health_accepted.pdf)
- 71 S Simpson (2017) Evaluation report – Conswater Community Greenway [conswatergreenway.co.uk/sites/default/files/CCGEvaluationReport20201920FINAL.pdf](https://conswatergreenway.co.uk/sites/default/files/CCGEvaluationReport20201920FINAL.pdf)
- 72 Institution of Civil Engineers (2017) Conswater Community Greenway [ice.org.uk/what-is-civil-engineering/what-do-civil-engineers-do/conswater-community-greenway-east-belfast-flood-a](https://ice.org.uk/what-is-civil-engineering/what-do-civil-engineers-do/conswater-community-greenway-east-belfast-flood-a) [online, accessed 14 Dec 2021]
- 73 R Luengo-Fernandez et al (2010) Dementia 2010 [alzheimersresearchuk.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/01/Dementia2010Full.pdf](https://alzheimersresearchuk.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/01/Dementia2010Full.pdf)
- 74 E Argyle et al (2017) Space, the final frontier: outdoor access for people living with dementia [tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/13607863.2016.1222351](https://tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/13607863.2016.1222351)
- 75 Active Minds (2019) Dementia and the importance of the outdoors [happiful.com/dementia-and-the-importance-of-the-outdoors/](https://happiful.com/dementia-and-the-importance-of-the-outdoors/) [online, accessed 28 Feb 2022]
- 76 N Mapes et al (2013) Is it nice outside? Consulting people living with dementia and their carers about engaging with the natural environment [dementiaadventure.co.uk/what-we-do/research/is-it-nice-outside/](https://dementiaadventure.co.uk/what-we-do/research/is-it-nice-outside/)
- 77 M Winterbotham et al (2021) The National Lottery Community Fund impact research report [tnlcommunityfund.org.uk/media/insights/documents/Exploring-the-impact-of-grant-funding.pdf](https://tnlcommunityfund.org.uk/media/insights/documents/Exploring-the-impact-of-grant-funding.pdf)
- 78 V Gewin (2020) How peat could protect the planet [nature.com/articles/d41586-020-00355-3](https://nature.com/articles/d41586-020-00355-3) [online, accessed 17 Dec 2021]



## Legal disclaimer

This report tells personal stories of grant holders and staff and shares examples of what has worked well for others. Any views, thoughts or opinions expressed by grant holders and staff do not necessarily represent the views, thoughts or opinions of The National Lottery Community Fund (“the Fund”). The Fund does not endorse or recommend any organisation mentioned, nor does it endorse any external content linked to in this report.

The content of this report should not be taken as an instruction, guidance or advice and you should not rely on the information in this report as an alternative to professional advice.

To the fullest extent permitted by law, the Fund accepts no responsibility and disclaims all liability to any third party who purports to use or rely for any reason whatsoever on the report, its contents, conclusions, any extract, reinterpretation amendment and/or modification by any third party is entirely at their own risk. We make no representations, warranties or guarantees, whether express or implied, that the content of this report is accurate, complete or up to date.

© Crown copyright 2022

This publication is licensed under the terms of the Open Government Licence v3.0 except where otherwise stated. To view this licence, visit <http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/doc/open-government-licence/version/3/>

Where we have identified any third party copyright information you will need to obtain permission from the copyright holders concerned. This publication is available at [www.gov.uk/government/publications](http://www.gov.uk/government/publications)

Any enquiries regarding this publication should be sent to us at The National Lottery Community Fund, 1 Plough Place, London, EC4A 1DE, or you can email us at [knowledge@tnlcommunityfund.org.uk](mailto:knowledge@tnlcommunityfund.org.uk)



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](mailto:knowledge@tnlcommunityfund.org.uk)

Key contacts: **Temoor Iqbal** and **Anne-Mari Hall**

The National Lottery Community Fund Version 1.  
Published in March 2022. Reference: KL22-01