

The Park Life report

**The first ever public satisfaction survey
of Britain's parks and green spaces**

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1. Introduction

The Park Life report is the first ever national satisfaction survey of Britain's parks and green spaces.

Almost 20,000 people have contributed their opinions on parks and green spaces which represents the biggest ever survey into what people think of Britain's parks and green spaces and the essential role that they play within the community.

Opinions were gathered via GreenSTAT, the visitor survey website that gives people throughout Britain the opportunity to comment on the quality of parks and green spaces, how they use them and how well they feel they are managed and maintained.

GreenSTAT also provides essential feedback to local authorities, and other managing organisations, about the people that visit parks. This will help them to better manage their available resources to improve the parks and green spaces that they are responsible for.

GreenSTAT has been developed by GreenSpace, a registered charity working to improve parks and green spaces by raising awareness, involving communities and creating skilled professionals.

GreenSTAT is an ongoing piece of live research from which 'snapshots' can be taken to give an illustration of public opinion at any given time.

GreenSpace intends to release annual reports based on the GreenSTAT data to illustrate trends in public opinion towards parks and green spaces.

Members of the public can register their opinions at any time at www.greenstat.org.uk

2. About GreenSpace

GreenSpace is a registered charity working to improve parks and green spaces by raising awareness, involving communities and creating skilled professionals.

Its work is delivered through four core practice areas, each with their own dedicated programme, products and activities designed to help it achieve its aims and objectives:

- **Awareness**

Work undertaken in this area includes Love Parks Week, a national campaign which promotes the benefits of parks and green spaces to the general public and encourages people to get out and enjoy the hundreds of events taking place as part of the campaign, and the Good Parks Guide, a 352-page full colour guide book featuring 500 of the UK's premier parks and green spaces to visit and enjoy

- **Community**

Work undertaken in this area includes Park It!, a three-year project providing funding, expertise and assistance to community groups who want to put on events in their local park or green space, and the Community Network, an online information resource designed to provide help and advice to over 1,000 community groups who are working to improve, manage or maintain their local parks and green spaces

- **Education**

Work undertaken in this area is driven by the Institute of Parks and Green Spaces (IPGS). IPGS aims to shape and influence national, regional and local policy, identify and promote good practice, improve education and training and promote working in the parks and green space sector as an attractive career option to both school and college leavers, young people and career changers

- **Improvement**

Work undertaken in this area is driven by GreenSTAT, a comprehensive visitor survey system for parks and green spaces and a national network of its own or affiliated regional forums that focus on promoting the sustainable planning, design, management and improvement of parks and green spaces at a local and regional level.

2.1. Key achievements

Through fostering partnerships, providing funding, networking and volunteering opportunities and delivering successful marketing and campaigns, GreenSpace has:

- **Delivered a partnership** with Groundwork and Communities and Local Government that injected £24.7m of funding into 1,000 projects designed to improve, or create, 'living spaces', including play areas, nature and wildlife areas, village greens and community gardens

- **Provided support and advice** to 3,500 volunteer groups via the Community Network, which has helped to galvanise 160,000 volunteers to invest 3.8m working hours to improve parks and green spaces throughout the UK

- **Organised a range of outdoor events**, including Park It! and Love Parks Week, which attracted 200,000 people into parks and green spaces during summer 2006

- **Delivered eight national conferences** during 2006/2007 which attracted 1,000 delegates from throughout the parks and green space sector to discuss and debate key issues such as crime and antisocial behaviour, climate change, funding and skills and training

- **Generated national, regional and local media coverage** that reached 15m people during 2006/2007, whilst generating awareness of core activities and key messages, and positioning the organisation as the voice of parks and green spaces in the UK.

3. GreenSTAT methodology

GreenSTAT has three methods of gathering responses from members of the public, whether they are regular visitors to parks and green spaces, occasional visitors, or non-users.

These are:

- Online questionnaires that can be completed at www.greenstat.org.uk. Anybody in the country can complete a questionnaire about absolutely any park or green space

- Hard copies can also be made available which allow residents to complete and return by post. These are also sometimes posted to random addresses across the country

- Face-to-face interviews may also take place 'on-site' within a park or green space as well as 'off-site', for example in town centres or other public spaces.

All of the UK's 470 local authorities are listed on GreenSTAT together with a list of the parks and green spaces they manage. Where the list of parks and green spaces is incomplete and a respondent cannot find the one that they wish to comment on, the system allows the respondent to write in the name and address of the space and add it to the list for others to respond to.

65 local authorities and managing organisations subscribe to GreenSTAT and promote the availability of the system at a local level.

4. Responses

4.1. Responses by type

- 92% of responses relate to local authority areas that are GreenSTAT clients, 8% address non-client local authority areas

- 26% of responses have been received online

- 56% of responses have been acquired from hard copies

- 12% have been acquired through 'off-site' face-to-face interviews

- 6% have been acquired through 'on-site' face-to-face interviews.

Responses have been received from 347 (74%) of 470 local authority areas.

It is estimated that in the UK there are in the region of 29,000 recognisable parks and green spaces.

GreenSTAT lists the names of a total of 6,595 parks and green spaces.

Responses have so far been received for 1,450 named parks and green spaces, which equates to almost 5% of the total stock and 22% of the parks and green spaces named on the system.

5. Nationwide summary of data (as of 1st June 2007)

5.1. The use of Britain's parks

Although 92% of respondents stated that they visit parks and green spaces in the UK, of which 70% are regular and 20% irregular visitors, the remaining 8% reported that they did not.

When asked to give an overall rating of their park or green space, 68% of respondents said they were satisfied or very satisfied and 14% said they were dissatisfied or very dissatisfied.

Over 55% of respondents visit a large park at least once a month. Only 2.5% of respondents have never visited a large park, suggesting that large parks and green spaces represent a considerable attraction for members of the general public.

Respondents visit parks for a wide range of reasons:

- A quarter of respondents (25%) visit simply to relax or think
- Over a fifth (21%) visit for peace and quiet
- Over a quarter (27%) visit to enjoy flowers and trees
- Just under a quarter (22%) visit to see birds and wildlife
- Over 11% visit to feed the birds or ducks
- Over a quarter (28%) visit to enjoy the beauty of the surroundings
- A little under half (43%) visit to get some fresh air
- Nearly half (45%) visit to go for a walk
- One in ten (10%) visit to ride their bike
- Nearly a fifth (19%) visit to walk their dogs
- 18% visit for a family outing or with children
- One in ten (10%) visit to meet friends
- 16% use their visits to keep fit and around 10% visit to improve their health
- 12% of people visit to play sports or games whereas only 4% do so to watch sports or games being played.

For 36% of respondents, their nearest park or green space is not the one that they visit most often, suggesting that there are mitigating circumstances that dissuade them from visiting their local park.

Nonetheless, over 90% of respondents agree that there is a park or green space within walking distance from their home, with only 6% disagreeing with this statement.

69% of people visit parks and green spaces on foot. 25% travel to parks in cars.

Few people use public transport to visit parks and green spaces with only 2% travelling by bus and less than 1% visiting by train, by tube or by metro.

For 67% of respondents who walk to their local park, their journey takes 10 minutes or less.

The vast majority (98%) of people feel that trees and green spaces can improve the appearance of a town.

97% of respondents believe that parks and green spaces help to create a nicer place for them to live.

82% of people believe that high quality green parks and spaces encourage people and businesses to locate in a town.

83% of respondents believe that parks and green spaces are a focal point for communities.

85% of respondents have never been asked their opinion on how parks and green spaces are managed.

Half of respondents (50%) would like to be consulted in the way parks are managed in the future, suggesting that on balance, people do wish to contribute to their local authority or park providers' strategies and policies on parks and green spaces in the UK.

5.2. The state of Britain's parks

Nearly two-thirds of respondents (62%) reported that their local parks are generally clean and well maintained.

31% of people are forced to travel to visit parks or green spaces because, in their opinion, the park most local to them does not provide the necessary standard or nature of facilities that they require.

Less than half (46%) of under 16's rated the facilities for children in their local parks as good or very good, whilst nearly a quarter (23%) rated them as poor or very poor.

A fifth of those people whose local park or green space is not the one they visit most often blame this on the facility being poorly maintained. Only 6.5% of respondents actually reported that they felt that their local park was too dirty.

Over a fifth of respondents (22%) of those whose local park or green space is not the one they visit most said that they found their local park or green space too boring and that they felt that there was not enough to do.

Less than half of respondents were broadly satisfied with the park or green space closest to their homes. 43% were satisfied or very satisfied with this green space compared to 29% of people who were either dissatisfied or very dissatisfied.

When asked about the facilities provided by their nearest park or green space, only a little over a half (57%) of respondents were happy with these, and over a quarter (27%) stated that they were unhappy.

Whilst nearly 70% of all respondents reported that they could easily get to other open spaces that do meet their needs, almost 16% said they can't.

For the 27% of respondents who are unhappy with the facilities offered by their nearest open space the situation is worse, with between 30% and 50% of these stating that they can't easily visit an alternative open space that does provide the facilities they need. For these respondents fear of crime also seems to be more of an issue with between 25% and 39% reporting that they don't feel safe when visiting parks and open spaces (compared to 15% of all respondents).

5.3. Children and parks

Children (under 16) who responded to GreenSTAT reported a wide range of reasons as to why they visit parks and green spaces, which are as follows:

- Over a fifth (21%) of children visit to relax or think
- Almost a third (32%) of children visit for fresh air
- A quarter (25%) of children visit to ride a bike
- Almost half (48%) of children visit to meet friends
- Almost half (49%) of children visit to play sport or games
- A fifth (20%) of children visit to keep fit.

Of concern is the fact that over a quarter (27%) of children report that they visit parks and green spaces less than four times a year.

Worryingly, only 41% of children rate the range of visitor facilities in parks and green spaces as good or very good with 29% them actually reporting that they consider them to be poor or very poor.

Over a third (36%) of children report that they have to travel for ten minutes or more to visit a park that they consider meets their needs.

Over three quarters (77%) of children visit a park in a group whereas only one in 20 (5%) visit parks and green spaces alone.

Just over two thirds (68%) of children visit the park with their friends and just under half (48%) go there to meet other friends.

Children's opinion of the design and appearance of parks and green spaces across the country is variable with only 60% of children rating these elements as good or very good.

Only 48% of children rate the standard of cleanliness and maintenance of parks and green spaces to be good or very good.

From an environmental perspective, over half (55%) of children think that the care and protection of nature and wildlife in parks and green spaces is good or very good.

The vast majority of children (85%) have never before been asked about their views on parks or green spaces.

In a sign that children are keen to give their views on this topic, nearly half (41%) who responded said they would like to be consulted or involved in the future.

5.4. Sports and recreation in parks

The responses confirm the importance of parks and green spaces for sport, recreation, health and fitness:

- 45% of people visit for a walk,
- 16% of people visit to keep fit
- 13% of people visit to play sport or games
- 11% of people visit to improve their health
- 10% of people visit to ride a bike.

Whilst just over half of respondents never use 'outside sports facilities', the use of these more formal facilities is still impressive with over a fifth of respondents (22%) using them at least once or twice a month including over 9% who visit at least weekly and 2.5% who visit most or every day.

Where children are concerned, the situation is far from ideal with less than half (44%) of under 16's rating the sports facilities in their local parks as good or very good, and worryingly nearly a third (31%) rating them as poor or very poor.

5.5. Parks and health and wellbeing

More than 7 out of 10 people visit their local park or green space on foot or by bike, which helps them to exercise before they even reach the green space.

This is countered by a quarter of people (25%) that still travel to their local park or green space in a car which obviously is not beneficial for the environment.

Nearly two thirds of respondents (65%) of respondents either agree or strongly agree with the statement that they feel safe when they visit their local park or green space. Worryingly, 16% disagree with the statement, suggesting that they therefore feel unsafe.

6. Contacts

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