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Green spaces – no longer just an after thought

Erica Popplewell – CPRE, the countryside charity



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Who are CPRE?

- We believe in countryside and green spaces that are accessible to all, rich in nature and playing a crucial role in responding to the climate emergency.
- With a local CPRE group in every county, we're advocating nationwide for the kind of countryside we all want: one with sustainable, healthy communities and available to more people than ever, including those who haven't benefited before.
- We stand for a countryside that enriches all of our lives, regenerating our wellbeing, and that we in turn regenerate, protect and celebrate.





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What is the value of greenspace?- CPRE research

A new poll, conducted in February 2021 by Opinium on behalf of CPRE, shows a surge in appreciation for local green spaces since the first lockdown, many of which are located in our Green Belts, and found that:

- Over two thirds (67%) of adults think protecting and enhancing green spaces should be a higher priority after lockdown;
- Nearly half (46%) reported visiting green spaces more since the start of lockdown – a dramatic 11 percentage point increase since April 2020;
- 59% reported they are more aware of the importance of these local green spaces for our mental health and wellbeing since lockdown.





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This followed polling in April 2020 commissioned by CPRE, the countryside charity and the HomeOwners Alliance in April 2020, and carried out online by YouGov as the lockdown started.

- 71% of adults in England think their local green space, or nearby countryside, could be enhanced.
- The majority of these would like to see more wildlife (52%) and a greater variety of plant life (52%) in their local green space;





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During lockdown, we have seen a surge in appreciation for local green spaces and a heightened awareness of their role in boosting our physical and mental health and wellbeing. For the one in eight households who do not have access to their own garden, accessible shared or public green spaces are all the more important.



those who were in favour of enhancements would like to see:

1. More wildlife including birds, butterflies and bees (52%)
2. More and a greater variety of trees, shrubs, hedgerows, plants and flowers (52%)
3. More wilding and less manicured green spaces, allowing nature to take its course (30%)





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1. More signposted walks (36%)
2. Better maintenance of paths and tending of trees and lawns (34%).

Unprompted, respondents added that reducing litter and litter collection are also key issues affecting our countryside and green spaces.





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Our Green Belt: worth investing in (2017) - Environmental consultants ADAS

Green Belts play a crucial role in enhancing the sustainability of our cities by providing essential ecological functions and recreational benefits that are fundamental to people's health and wellbeing.

- 13% of all Green Belt land is Priority Habitat.
- A high proportion (19%) of all England's deciduous woodland is located in Green Belts.
- Other Priority Habitat types that have a high presence in Green Belts are lowland heathland (15% of the overall England total), lowland meadow (15%), lowland fen (14%) and good quality semi-improved grassland (12%)
- 47% of Country Parks in England are found in Green Belts; 35% of Woodland Trust Land; 34% of Local Nature Reserves; and 23% of Registered Parks and Gardens.





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Recognise the value of greenbelt as Greenspace and protect it - The countryside next door report February 2021

- Green Belt is the countryside next door for 30 million people living in our largest towns and cities.
- One of the primary roles of the Green Belt is to maintain the openness of the countryside, and it encourages housing to be placed near to where we work and the amenities we need.
- The countryside near to where people live has never had a greater test of its importance to people's health and wellbeing than during the start of the coronavirus pandemic.
- However, Green Belt land continues to be threatened by development, decreasing its ability to provide for nature and reduce the impacts of climate change and people's access to green spaces.



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- The current and future threat of housing development faced by Green Belt land continues to be unprecedented.
- There are currently 257,944 homes proposed for greenfield land removed from the Green Belt in advanced local plans, which remains a high level of threat in comparison to our previous reports.
- We are likely to see this number increase in the future, as the government's proposed method for calculating housing need will put extreme pressure on Green Belt.
- For example, in London there will be a need to find space for an excess of 177,907 homes beyond what current London brownfield land can accommodate, resulting in pressure on the Green Belt





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The ingredients necessary to enhance our greenspaces Evidence from Natural England

The image shows the cover of a report. The top portion features a photograph of ducks swimming in a body of water. Below the photo is a large maroon section containing white text. The title is 'A rapid scoping review of health and wellbeing evidence for the Framework of Green Infrastructure Standards'. Below the title is the text '1st Edition September 2020'. At the bottom left of the maroon section is the URL 'www.gov.uk/natural-england'. At the bottom right is the Natural England logo, which consists of a green square with the words 'NATURAL ENGLAND' in white capital letters.

A rapid scoping review of health and wellbeing
evidence for the Framework of Green
Infrastructure Standards

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www.gov.uk/natural-england





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- The provision of different types of green infrastructure around the home, place of work or education, or along transportation routes, is likely to maximise the potential ways in which people benefit.
- Both public (such as street trees, parks, and playgrounds) and private (such as domestic gardens) green infrastructure are important and support health in different ways.
- Green infrastructure that is well looked after is more likely to be perceived as safe and inviting, and therefore to be used.



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- A good understanding of the needs and desires of local communities will help ensure new or improved provision is suitable.
- New or improved provision of green infrastructure has the potential to increase inequalities in health between different social groups. This is complex but can come about through, for example, processes of social exclusion, gentrification and pushing up of house prices. Care must be taken to try and understand the potential impacts of actions and to ensure that provision is equitable and fair.





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Case Study - 10 new parks for London – a CPRE London Campaign

- London has just half the green space it needs for a population its size.
- There are many green spaces in London which are just sitting idle – at best ignored, at worst deliberately run down by owners and coming under threat from development
- local community groups have come forward to transform these sites in new parks and nature reserves. CPRE London are now launching a major new campaign to turn these sites into ten major new parks, creating them from London's forgotten green assets.
- We want to gain commitments from the Mayor of London and the relevant boroughs to work with local groups to transform these spaces into useful new parks.



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Case Study - East London Waterworks Park

In the centre of the Lea Valley Regional Park and on the border of Hackney and Waltham Forest, this site is protected Metropolitan Open Land. Some time ago Thames Water was given permission to turn it into a depot and, more recently, it was sold on and a planning application to build two free schools was turned down. Now local people are campaigning to buy it and turn it into the East London Waterworks Park.

Their vision is to transform the 5.8-hectare site into a place for wild swimming and a place where people learn to live harmoniously with nature. It is a once-in-a-generation opportunity to return a brownfield site to nature and, in doing so, create a unique habitat that will increase biodiversity and help improve the physical and mental health of all who visit.



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Future requirements for sustainable green spaces

- Recognition of their many values
- Protection for Greenbelt
- Community involvement at all stage
- Investment to enhance and protect all greenspaces
- Prioritisation over housing, to be considered as part of the planning process

