

# Press release: Local greenspaces important for children of all ages and backgrounds

New data [published today](#) by Natural England shows the majority of children and young people are regularly spending time outdoors.

Natural England's Monitoring of Engagement with the Natural Environment (MENE) report found that 70% of all children in England under the age of 16, and 64% of young people aged 16-24 are said to be spending time outside at least once a week. However, there are still clear inequalities with children living in lower income areas being less likely to visit the natural environment compared with those living in areas of higher income.

The findings highlight the importance of local greenspaces, including urban parks, recreation grounds and playgrounds for children's play and experience of the natural world. Across all age groups and backgrounds, local greenspaces provide an important opportunity for children to experience the natural environment on a regular basis, with these spaces becoming even more vital for children who are least likely to visit the natural environment frequently.

This is one of the reasons why Natural England is leading a new cross-government project to review and update standards for green infrastructure, in addition to working with the Parks Action Group, to overcome barriers to access, and to ensure England's public parks and green spaces meet the needs of communities now and in the future.

The government, through its [25 Year Environment Plan](#), published in January 2018, has set an ambitious target to improve the environment within a generation, kicking off this target with the launch of the [Year of Green Action](#), focusing on connecting people with the environment to improve health and wellbeing. Within this, Government has set out a range of commitments to enhance opportunities for children, young people and adults from all backgrounds to engage with the natural world, and to help improve social injustice by opening up the mental and physical health and wellbeing.

As part of this Plan, Environment Secretary Michael Gove recently announced the Children and Nature Programme, awarding £10 million in funding to help support more children from deprived areas to have the opportunity for experiences in nature within a variety of local natural environments, including school grounds, community forests, woodlands and care farms.

Liz Newton, Director of Strategy Development, Natural England, said:

It is important that all children and young people have the opportunity to visit natural environments on a regular basis to

support their health and wellbeing.

The MENE Children 2017/18 report confirms that children from lower income areas are visiting the natural environment less often than children from higher income areas. It also highlights the importance of local green spaces – including urban parks – as important spaces for children of all ages and backgrounds to discover and experience the benefits of the natural environment.

Through the work that Natural England is leading on the Children and Nature Programme, part of the government's 25 Year Environment Plan, we are committed to connecting more children with their local natural environments, particularly those children from lower income areas.

Graham Duxbury, Chief Executive of Groundwork UK and member of the Parks Action Group, said:

We know that parks and green spaces are hugely important to the development and wellbeing of children and young people – helping them connect with nature, increase physical activity and build social networks.

To better understand how young people currently use the natural environment is the first step in helping them get more involved in making decision about their local area, a key priority if we are going to deliver the aspirations of the Government's 25 Year Environment Plan.

Natural England will continue to monitor trends in children's engagement with nature and look to work with our research partners to better understand these changes and their implications for children's health and wellbeing, as well as the design of future green features within villages, towns and cities across England.

Children are also being encouraged to take part in nature activities through the Department for Education's ['My Activity Passport'](#). The passport is aimed at primary school children and outlines a range of activities and key milestones for children to take part in within each year of primary school, helping to enrich their experiences. The Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government are also taking action by [awarding £9.7 million](#) for local authorities to better maintain, protect and increase their recreational spaces.

More recently, Natural England has worked to increase people's access to the natural environment through a recent [announcement](#) for the opening of the latest stretch of the [England Coast Path](#), increasing access to the magnificent Lincolnshire coastline with a new 16-mile route from Skegness to Mabelthrope. Once completed, the coastline will be the longest continuous coastal walking route in the world, and will become a National Trail – the

nation's finest and most popular long-distance paths.