

Press release: Visits to parks on the rise as city dwellers head outdoors

Visits to city parks and green spaces in England were up by 25 per cent in 2016 as compared to 2010, new research published today (Friday, 6 July) by Natural England has revealed.

Natural England's Urban Greenspaces report also found that more people are visiting the natural environment within towns and cities across England than ever before with an estimated 879 million visits to parks in towns and cities in 2015/16.

The report brings together findings from Natural England's annual 'Monitor of Engagement with the Natural Environment' (MENE) public survey and explores how people living in urban areas engage with the natural environment and visit urban greenspaces.

The government's 25 Year Environment Plan aims to connect more people with the environment by creating more green infrastructure in towns and cities, helping people improve their health and wellbeing by using green spaces and encouraging children to be close to nature, with particular focus on disadvantaged areas.

Data from March 2009 to February 2016 was analysed, and showed:

- Urban Greenspaces are increasingly utilised with an estimated 1.46 billion visits in 2015/16 compared with 1.16 billion visits in 2009/10
- 93 per cent of the urban population claimed to have taken visits to the natural environment for recreation in the last 12 months
- There has been a decrease in the use of cars and vans to reach urban greenspaces between 2010 and 2016 with around seven in ten visits taken on foot in 2015/16
- Public parks, recreation grounds and other greenspaces were the most common places visited within towns and cities (47 per cent, 9 per cent and 14 per cent of all visits respectively), but people also reported visiting urban woodlands (5 per cent), rivers and canals (7 per cent)
- For some urban residents visits to the natural environment may be the only opportunity to exercise

Principle Specialist for People and the Environment at Natural England, Rose O'Neill, said:

The MENE survey gives us a valuable insight into how people enjoy the great outdoors.

We know that lots of us love a visit to our local park or favourite green spot and it is great to see this is on the rise. Research has shown a clear and important link between urban greenspaces and mental health which underlines the important role the natural

environment can have in all of our lives.

The MENE survey is funded by Natural England, with support from the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra).

It was first commissioned in 2009 and has provided a wealth of evidence relating to outdoor recreation, behaviour and attitudes. With 81 per cent of England's population reported as living in urban areas in 2015/16, this data provides a valuable insight into how people use and relate to the natural environment.

Natural England uses the research to understand how people use, enjoy and are motivated to protect the natural environment and to help monitor changes in use of the natural environment over time.

Across all seven years of the MENE survey, four in 10 urban residents (40 per cent) had taken at least one visit to the natural environment in the seven days prior to being interviewed

It also found that some people are more likely to visit urban greenspaces, than other natural places further afield, including:

- Those aged 16-34
- Those in the black and minority ethnic population
- Those who don't have access to a car
- People with children