

Access to nature

Past drivers

Main reasons for visiting the outdoors are: health and exercise; exercising a dog; to relax or unwind; or to enjoy fresh air or pleasant weather. Lack of time and poor health are the main factors cited for not visiting the outdoors. Accessibility of outdoor recreational space is an important influence, both in terms of its proximity to people's homes and its connections. Clear association between proximity to green space and level of affluence.



Where are we now?

- During 2016 48.5% of adults were estimated to have visited the outdoors at least once a week, up from 44% in 2006.
- Walking distance to people's nearest green space and frequency of use has remained fairly stable over time.
- 82% of adults in Scotland visited the outdoors for recreation in 2013-14, with 50% visiting the outdoors on a weekly basis.
- However the total number of visits to the outdoors by adults in 2013-14 was 395.8 million, the highest figure recorded since 2006.
- 50% of visits to the outdoors taken by adults in 2013-14 were to the countryside, a third in a town or city and 16% on seaside locations.
- Walking is the most popular outdoor past-time, followed by family outings.
- 81% of adults rated the provision of woods for recreation across Scotland as either good or very good.
- Three-quarters of urban residents made at least one visit to a local green space area in 2013-14, with 47% visiting on a weekly basis.

Key evidence gaps

Evidence on overcoming some of the key barriers to improving access to nature, particularly for people from deprived areas.

Future drivers

Key barriers to participation in outdoor recreation include: provision of opportunities and information; poor health and mobility; lack of, or reduced, social connections; fragility and vulnerability; lack of motivation and time commitments; safety; and weather and season.



Where do we want to be?

- Everyone can access, enjoy and connect with nature. ¹



Current initiatives and their impact

National Walking and Cycling Network.
Green Infrastructure Fund.
Scottish planning policy – “open space strategies” and place standard.
Central Scotland Green Network.
Scottish Historical Environment Policy.
National Parks.
Our Natural Health Service.
Scottish Outdoor Access Code.
Woods for learning and Woods for health.

¹ Draft outcome, Developing an Environment Strategy for Scotland: Discussion Paper

Draft Knowledge Account – Access to nature

A. Introduction

1. There are various definitions of “nature” and what is meant by access to nature. For the purpose of this knowledge account, “nature” is taken to include outdoor recreation and green space.
2. Outdoor recreation is beneficial for health and well-being. It also provides opportunities for people to come into contact with, and increase their understanding of, the natural environment.
3. There is increasing evidence of the link between greater physical activity - in the form of green exercise - and better physical and mental health. It also provides opportunities for people to come into contact with, and increase their understanding of, the natural environment.
4. Regularly making use of good quality green space can improve people's quality of life by increasing their satisfaction with their neighbourhood, promoting physical health and mental wellbeing and reducing health inequalities. Green space also links to community aspects, such as community cohesion, social connectedness and community resilience. Being able to access high quality green space can improve the health, wellbeing and confidence of people and communities.

B. Recent trends

5. During 2016, 48.5% of adults are estimated to have visited the outdoors at least once a week, compared to 48.6% in 2015, and 44% in 2006 (the baseline year).ⁱ
6. Around four-fifths of the adult population in Scotland visited the outdoors for recreation in the 12 months prior to 2013-14 (82%). Half reported that they had visited the outdoors on at least a weekly basis during this period (50%), with 16% visiting daily. The likelihood of visiting the outdoors in the previous 12 months varied by demographic factors relating to age, affluence, health and the presence of children in the household.ⁱⁱ
7. The estimated volume of visits to the outdoors taken by adults in Scotland in the period March 2013 to February 2014 was 395.8 million, the highest annual figure recorded since 2006.ⁱⁱⁱ
8. Half of all outdoor visits were taken in countryside locations in the period March 2013 to February 2014, around a third were taken in a town or city and 16% were taken in seaside locations. The proportion of visits taken in each of these three location types in 2013-14 were similar to those recorded in previous years.^{iv}
9. Local parks or open spaces remain the most frequently visited destination on outdoor visits (41% of all visits in 2013/14). Just under a quarter of visits included a forest or woodland destination (23%), equating to an estimated 90.1m visits over the 12 month period.^v
10. Walking has remained the most popular outdoor past-time enjoyed by adults in Scotland each year between 2004 and 2013/14 (in the range 79% - 88%), with ‘Family outings’ the second most popular (15% of visits in 2013/14).^{vi}

11. Seventy-eight per cent of adults who had visited the outdoors (equating to 63% of all adults in Scotland) made at least one visit to forests or woodland in the 12 months prior to interview. Eighty one per cent of all adults rated the provision of woods for recreation across Scotland as a whole as 'good' or 'very good' compared to 62% who provided this rating for the provision of woods in their local area. ^{vii}
12. For green space, the walking distance from people's home and the frequency of use has remained fairly stable year to year, with those living closest to their local green space generally using it more frequently. Three-quarters of respondents living in urban areas in Scotland reported living within a 10 minute walk of their local green space (75%) and just over half reported that they lived within a 5 minute walk (55%). ^{viii}
13. Around three-quarters of urban residents made at least one visit to a local green space area in the 12 months prior to interview (76%). Almost half visited their local green space on a weekly basis during that period (47%).
14. Furthermore, research found that those respondents who reported having a disability were significantly less likely to visit the outdoors once a week or more (26% compared to 52% of those without a disability). Furthermore, the research found that in 2016 those in BME (black and minority ethnic) groups were significantly less likely to visit the outdoors once a week or more compared to white respondents (35% compared to 49% respectively).
15. Older adults are less likely to visit the outdoors once a week or more, and the effect is particularly strong amongst in the 76 year and over group.

C. Past drivers of change

16. The most frequently cited reasons for visiting the outdoors were health or exercise (the motivation for 43% of visits) and exercising a dog (42%). Around a quarter of visits were taken to relax or unwind (27%) or to enjoy fresh air or pleasant weather (25%). The most frequently cited reasons for not visiting the outdoors were lack of time (mentioned by 36% of respondents) and poor health (23%).
17. Accessibility of outdoor recreation space is an important influence, both in terms of its proximity to people's homes and in its connections, with easy access points and clear links between areas of green space (leading to 'green networks'). Another important influence is the way people feel in the green spaces, such as whether they feel safe.
18. Education and awareness are also important. Education can increase people's perception of outdoor recreation as a valuable activity and their knowledge of the natural environment. Increasing awareness of available green spaces will help to stimulate their use.
19. How often local green space is used can depend on how long it takes people to get there and how satisfied they are with the space.
20. The Land Reform (Scotland) Act 2003 establishes a right of responsible non-motorised access to most land and inland water in Scotland. The rights and responsibilities of outdoor visitors and land managers are explained in the Scottish Outdoor Access Code which sets out where access

rights apply and what you can do within access rights. It also describes where you cannot go in exercising access rights, such as fields of crops or the gardens of houses.

D. Future drivers

21. The barriers to participation in outdoor recreation by older people are multiple and inter-related. The interplay and interactions between barriers are important as the co-occurrence of multiple barriers is common and intensifies the effect of individual barriers to participate in outdoor recreation.
22. The key categories of barriers include: poor health and (im)mobility; lack of or reduced social connections; fragility and vulnerability; lack of motivation and time commitments; safety; and weather and season.

E. Current interventions and their impact

23. Scottish Natural Heritage has a responsibility for promoting understanding of the opportunities for outdoor recreation, including promotion of the Scottish Outdoor Access Code. Local Authorities and National Park Authorities have a key role in promoting outdoor recreation opportunities in their areas and are responsible for developing the core path networks in their areas. Core paths enable and encourage all members of the public to exercise their rights of access.
24. National Walking and Cycling Network: There are approximately 2,371 miles (3,815km) of National Cycle Network routes in Scotland, including 644 miles of traffic-free routes which use a mix of railway path, canal towpath, forest road, shared-use path, segregated cycle lanes and re-determined rural footways. 41% of the Scottish population now lives within a third of a mile of a National Cycle Network route.
25. Scottish planning policy encourages local authorities to prepare 'open space strategies' to guide future provision within their areas, in particular through the planning system. An open space strategy should comprise of these main elements: an audit of existing open space provision; an assessment of current and future requirements; and a strategy statement with a clear set of priorities and actions.
26. Scottish Government's National Planning Framework 3 (NPF3) includes the National Walking and Cycling Network as a national development to support recreation, tourism and active travel.
27. Central Scotland Green Network (CSGN): is one of Europe's biggest green space projects, covering 10,000 square kilometres over 19 local authority areas, and is home to 3.5 million people. This is being developed to enhance landscapes, wildlife and recreational opportunities in central Scotland.
28. Forestry Commission Scotland is undertaking a range of initiatives under its Woods for Learning and Woods for Health strategies which encourage access and enjoyment of nature.

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- ⁱ Scottish Household Survey 2017, <http://www.gov.scot/Publications/2017/09/9979/0>
- ⁱⁱ Scottish People and Nature Study, SNH
<https://www.nature.scot/professional-advice/land-and-sea-management/managing-access-and-recreation/increasing-participation/measuring-participation>
- ⁱⁱⁱ Scottish People and Nature Study, SNH
<https://www.nature.scot/professional-advice/land-and-sea-management/managing-access-and-recreation/increasing-participation/measuring-participation>
- ^{iv} Scottish People and Nature Study, SNH
<https://www.nature.scot/professional-advice/land-and-sea-management/managing-access-and-recreation/increasing-participation/measuring-participation>
- ^v Scottish People and Nature Study, SNH
<https://www.nature.scot/professional-advice/land-and-sea-management/managing-access-and-recreation/increasing-participation/measuring-participation>
- ^{vi} Scottish People and Nature Study, SNH
<https://www.nature.scot/professional-advice/land-and-sea-management/managing-access-and-recreation/increasing-participation/measuring-participation>
- ^{vii} Public Opinion of Forestry 2017, Scotland
[https://www.forestry.gov.uk/pdf/pof2017scot.pdf/\\$FILE/pof2017scot.pdf](https://www.forestry.gov.uk/pdf/pof2017scot.pdf/$FILE/pof2017scot.pdf)
- ^{viii} The Third State of Scotland's Greenspace Report, 2018
http://www.greenspacescotland.org.uk/Data/Sites/1/media/docs/sosgreport/3rdstateofscotlandsgreenspace-report_010218.pdf