

Written Evidence – greenspace scotland (PTC0012)

greenspace scotland welcomes the opportunity to submit evidence to the Covid-19 Committee's inquiry into the long-term impact of the pandemic on the UK's towns and cities.

This submission draws extensively on our work as part of the Public Health Scotland hosted Social & System Recovery (S&SR) Environment & Spaces and Transport Groups which were established in May 2020 to understand how the coronavirus pandemic (COVID-19) is affecting our places, how people interact within them and how this impacts upon the health of those communities.

About greenspace scotland

greenspace scotland is Scotland's parks and greenspace charity - an independent charitable company and social enterprise. Since 2002, we have provided a national lead on greenspace working with national and local partners to shape policy and promote good practice. Our goal is that everyone has easy access to quality greenspaces that meet local needs and improve quality of life.

The greenspace scotland network connects over 200 organisations (from public, private, third and community sectors) who have a role in creating, managing and using greenspaces. We also support the Scottish Park Managers Forum which provides a professional network for park and greenspace managers. The Forum connects over 180 park managers from all 32 Scottish local authorities.

greenspace scotland chairs the Public Health Scotland Social & Systems Recovery Environment & Spaces Group and is a member of the Transport Group.

About Public Health Scotland Social & System Recovery Groups

The Social & Systems Recovery (S&SR) Environment & Spaces and Transport Groups are hosted by Public Health Scotland (PHS). They bring together partners from national and local government, the third sector and academia who are involved in environment, place and transport policy, planning and implementation to consider (a) how the coronavirus pandemic is affecting our places and how people interact within them (b) how this impacts upon the health and wellbeing of those communities and (c) policy and practice responses in the transition through and beyond Covid-19

Working with the MRC/CSO Social and Public Health Sciences Unit at the University of Glasgow, the S&SR Environment & Spaces Group has published two reports on *Covid-19 Green and Open Space Use*. The reports draw on data from UK-wide YouGov surveys commissioned by MRC/CSO (April & Nov 2020), Google Mobility Data and NatureScot survey (June 2020).

- [Change in use of green and open space following COVID-19 lockdown 'stay at home' phase and initial easing of lockdown](#)
- [COVID-19 Green and Open Space Use in Autumn 2020](#)

A third report drawing on survey data from April 2021 is currently being finalised; this includes priorities for post-pandemic recovery.

A report looking at use of greenspace by housing tenure is also being prepared and can be shared with the Committee in due course – early [unpublished] findings are included below.

The S&SR Transport Group has published a rapid evidence review and briefing paper: [Transport use, health and health inequalities: The impact of measures to reduce the spread of COVID-19](#)

greenspace scotland, Jubilee House, Forthside Way, Stirling FK8 1QZ
greenspacescotland.org.uk | info@greenspacescotland.org.uk | @greenspacescot
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(a) Greenspace and housing

The S&SR Environment & Spaces Group has published two reports on *Covid-19 Green and Open Space Use*. Our response draws on these reports and is structured around the questions posed by the Committee:

1. What is the long-term impact of the pandemic likely to be on housing and green spaces in towns and cities?

Covid-19 has focused attention on the importance of access to quality public greenspaces and to gardens and/or shared private spaces and the vital role of these spaces for population health and wellbeing.

Surveys during the pandemic have highlighted inequalities in terms of access to and use of greenspace and gardens.

This reinforces the importance of ensuring everyone has access to quality local greenspaces; the need for a place-based approach to the design of new developments, with the inclusion of greenspace, green infrastructure and gardens; and the retrofitting of green infrastructure within existing neighbourhoods.

2. How might this increase, or decrease, inequalities?

Socio-economic inequalities in use of green and open spaces existed before lockdown. Lockdown (and the period following relaxing of restrictions) did not reduce these and may have made them worse.

Use of green and open space was polarised during lockdown [Apr 2020] - some people did increase their frequency of use and time spent outside, but many made fewer or no visits.

There were sharp inequalities in visiting green and open space [in Nov 2020] - 71% of those classed as high socio-economic status visited in the previous 4 weeks compared to just 53% of those of low socio-economic status.

The frequency of visits to green and open space varied considerably by individual demographic group [Nov 2020] - those aged 18 to 24 years, females and BAME individuals visited green and open space less frequently.

Access to gardens and private shared space

ONS studies show that 1 in 8 British households do not have a garden and the percentage of homes without a garden is higher among ethnic minorities.

In the MRC/YouGov survey, only 11% of homeowners did not have access to a private garden at their home, compared to 49% of private renters, 44% of local authority tenants and 39% of housing association tenants.

Homeowners were most likely to have access to outdoor space, and for most homeowners this space was a garden. Access to outdoor space and for this space to be a garden reduced for all other tenures with people renting privately being least likely to have access to any outdoor space, or to have a garden:

Only 3% of homeowners shared outdoor space at home, compared to 22% of private renters, 22% renting from a local authority and 15% renting from a housing association.

Homeowners visited public greenspace most, yet they are also most likely to have their own outdoor space at home and for this outdoor space to be a garden they have sole use of.

3. How could the UK Government, town and cities leaders, and others use their response to the pandemic to reduce inequalities in housing and green spaces?

Recommendations from the S&SR Recovery Environment and Space group include:

1. Ensure the physical and fiscal protection of green and open spaces.
There was a marked increase in use of green and open spaces following the initial 2020 lockdown period, highlighting the importance of these spaces for population health and wellbeing.
2. Recognise that increase in use was not equal; socio-economic inequality remains. Action is needed to redress the underlying socio-economic inequality in access to, and use of, public and private open space.
3. Recognise many people access green spaces at home, particularly older people. This highlights the ongoing need to ensure housing offers access to green space and gardens.
4. Recognise that those who do use open spaces feel the benefit on their mental health.
The extent of reporting these benefits increased considerably during 2020. These spaces are an essential resource for community wellbeing. They must be protected and prioritised.
5. Use the opportunities offered by policies or initiatives that could promote and improve access to green and open space access particularly for those without access to gardens at home or green space close by:
 - Providing gardens for new housing and retro-fitting of existing provision
 - Ensuring access to good quality green spaces within 20-minute neighbourhoods
 - Promoting road reallocation for green active travel routes and to provide community green space

- Addressing unequal access to green space through open space strategies and play sufficiency assessments
 - Re-purposing vacant and derelict land as community green space
 - Using community wealth building as a driver for transforming local assets, including vacant and derelict land
6. Act to redress gaps in data and understanding about groups not well covered in current research; those in the most marked socio-economic deprivation, and children (particularly teenage years), are missing from the evidence base [in Scotland].

(b) Public transport

The S&SR Transport Group published a rapid evidence review and briefing paper last Autumn. The report sets out why transport is important for health and wellbeing, the impact of Covid-19 and the mitigation measures on how we move around and the potential impact on health and health inequalities.

Report: [Transport use, health and health inequalities: The impact of measures to reduce the spread of COVID-19](#)

The Group is currently looking at the health impact of road reallocation measures and findings from this evidence review can be shared in due course.

1. What is the long-term impact of the pandemic likely to be on public transport in towns and cities?

COVID-19 has, and will continue to have, a significant impact on the number of trips people make and their modes of travel to go to work and education, access goods and services to meet with daily needs and connect socially.

The most significant impact has been a large reduction in public transport journeys. Although car journeys also reduced initially, they are now rising steadily.

Ensuring everyone has access to an affordable, available, accessible, appropriate and sustainable transport system which enables safe active travel for all ages during the transition through and beyond COVID-19 will benefit the health and wellbeing of all the population.

2. How might this increase, or decrease, inequalities?

Reduced capacity and use of public transport are likely to reduce transport options and add financial strain for people without access to a car, people on low incomes, older people, disabled people, people with health problems and younger people.

Alternatives to using public transport have both positive and negative effects on health and wellbeing, and health inequalities. Increased use of active travel modes would bring health benefits to individuals and communities, but an increase in car traffic would have negative effects not only for individual transport users but also for the wider society.

3. How could the UK Government, town and cities leaders, and others use their response to the pandemic to reduce inequalities in public transport?

The S&SR Transport Group recommends that transport decision-making by transport and planning policymakers at national and local level aligns with and supports the sustainable transport hierarchy.

Prioritised actions should be those that:

- protect the long-term sustainability of public or community transport services through, for example, improving accessibility, availability, affordability and appropriateness, and ensuring greater integration of transport services and ticketing to facilitate multi-modal journeys
- limit increases in private car travel and reduce the adverse impacts of motor traffic on health through, for example, demand management systems and the use of low-emission zones or support active travel through, for example, the provision of cycling and pedestrian infrastructure and ensuring that it links into public transport nodes and systems.

Reviewing emerging evidence, monitoring data on changes in transport use and improving information on the impacts on equality groups to ensure the implications of access to work, education, goods and services, and social connectedness are understood are all key to decision-making about sustainable, equitable and health-promoting transport options at a local level, ensuring policies and interventions are effective in improving health and equality outcomes.

This is a brief summary from greenspace scotland and the Social & System Recovery Groups for Environment & Spaces and Transport. We would be happy to provide further evidence and recommendations to the Committee and share future reports from the S&SR Groups when they are published.

1 July 2021