



Urban Nature North

Full research report



Nature North



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1. Background & method

Project objectives



Urban green spaces in the North

In England, 82.9% of the population currently live in urban areas, and this share is growing. However, geospatial mapping indicates that publicly accessible green spaces in urban areas are not evenly distributed across England, with fewer available to residents in the North of the country.

Urban green spaces present a fantastic opportunity to deliver on a wide variety of key objectives for towns and cities in the North. This is a role they have played since early urbanisation, and it is why so many early Northern industrial philanthropists subscribed and gave land to the establishment of much-loved historic parks.

With towns and cities grappling with challenges such as climate change, air pollution, the decline of retail, mental health crises, and nature loss, urban green spaces represent a key opportunity for leaders to protect and future-proof their towns and cities, while also enhancing their prosperity and liveability. Urban woodlands, rivers, wetlands and coastal habitats can all play a significant role in this.

Urban Nature North (UNN)

The UNN project has sought the views of the public and stakeholders to understand how to create ambitious change and unlock investment for public green spaces in the towns and cities of the North of England (the North East, the North West, and Yorkshire and the Humberside).

To achieve this, evidence has been gathered to demonstrate the value of investing in urban green space, in order to advocate to policy makers and investors, and to identify a network of leaders who want to realise the public benefits of quality green spaces.



The UNN project comprises four main workstreams in which a range of consultants have supported lines of enquiry:

Autumn 2022 Mapping and data collection	Autumn 2022 – Spring 2023 Economic valuation	Autumn 2022 – Summer 2023 Community and stakeholder engagement	Summer 2023 – Autumn 2023 Making it happen
Using Natural England data, the National Trust has found that a large proportion of people in the North do not currently have the recommended level of access to green space within a 15 minute walk. Some of the most deprived communities also suffer from a lack of access.	Consultants Eftec have demonstrated the significant current value of accessible urban green spaces in the North, estimated as a minimum of £2.6 bn per annum. Substantial value to communities are provided from their welfare, physical and mental health, and air quality benefits.	Thinks Insight and Strategy were commissioned to independently conduct research with the public and stakeholders, hearing their views about the future of green spaces and how their benefits could be increased and sustained.	Pulling together the research and insight, Thinks Insight and Strategy have developed this report to outline what needs to happen to bring about ambitious change which unlocks the power of urban green space in the North.

This report is focused on this stage of the project

Objectives for this stage of work

This research was designed to deliver the following key objectives:

- **Deliver insight into the views and needs of local communities** in relation to urban green spaces, including how they are currently used and experienced, the impact of a lack of green spaces, and expectations for future development.
- **Explore views of local stakeholders** on accessible urban spaces, and understand the specific challenges faced in the North to their development.
- **Develop clear recommendations and guidance for future change**, in collaboration with the Urban Nature North team, with evidenced recommendations for further activity.



To meet these objectives, we conducted a multi-stage research project

Public research with residents of Northern Towns and Cities

7-day online community
57 members of the public across the north

6 x 3 hour in person workshops with same research participants

10 question online survey with **1009** residents across the North

Stakeholder research

4 x 90-minute scoping workshops with **32** stakeholders

4 x 60 90-minute thematic workshops with **31** stakeholders from health, social, environment and local authorities

11 x 40-minute depth interviews with specialist stakeholders in health, local regeneration or finance

2 x full day place-based workshops held in Manchester and Newcastle with **23** stakeholders from health, regeneration, environment and community

Stakeholder participation overview

Overall	Total
Total number of stakeholders who participated in the research	72
Stakeholder group	Total
Environment	36
Local Authority	18
Health	7
Academic	4
Think-tank	3
Regeneration	2
Finance	1
NGO	1

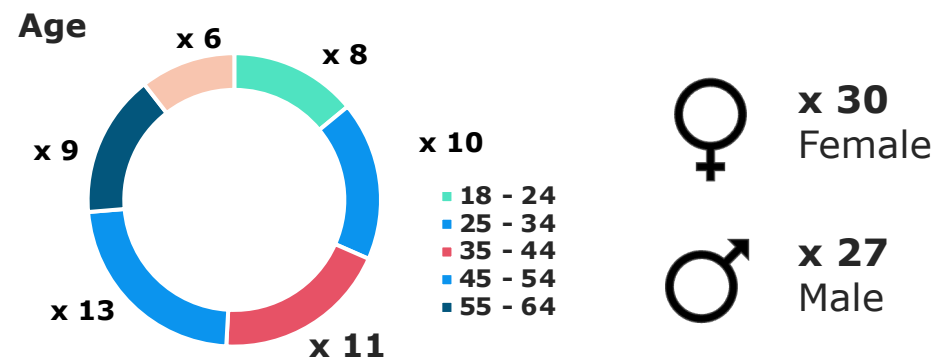
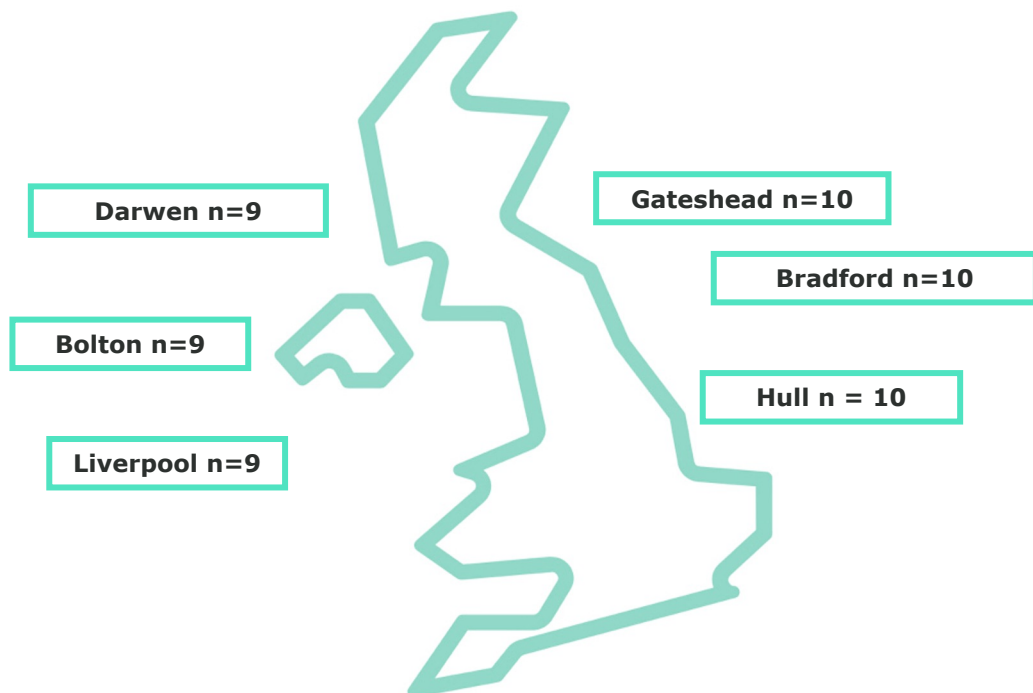
*This overview does not include the 43 stakeholders that participated in place-based workshops.

Stakeholder participation overview



Public participation overview (qualitative)

57 members of the public took part in the qualitative component of research, across the following 6 locations*:



x 19 ethnic minority background



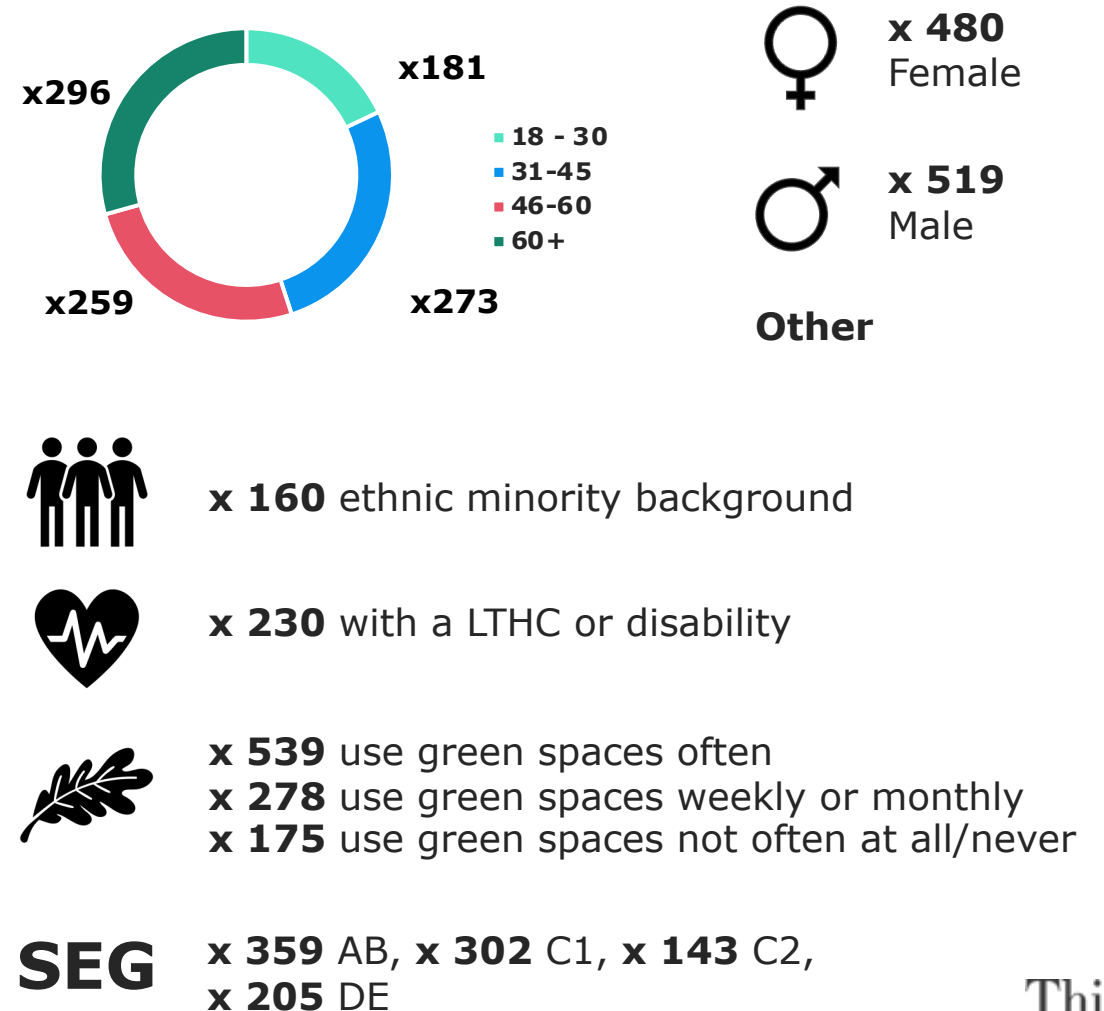
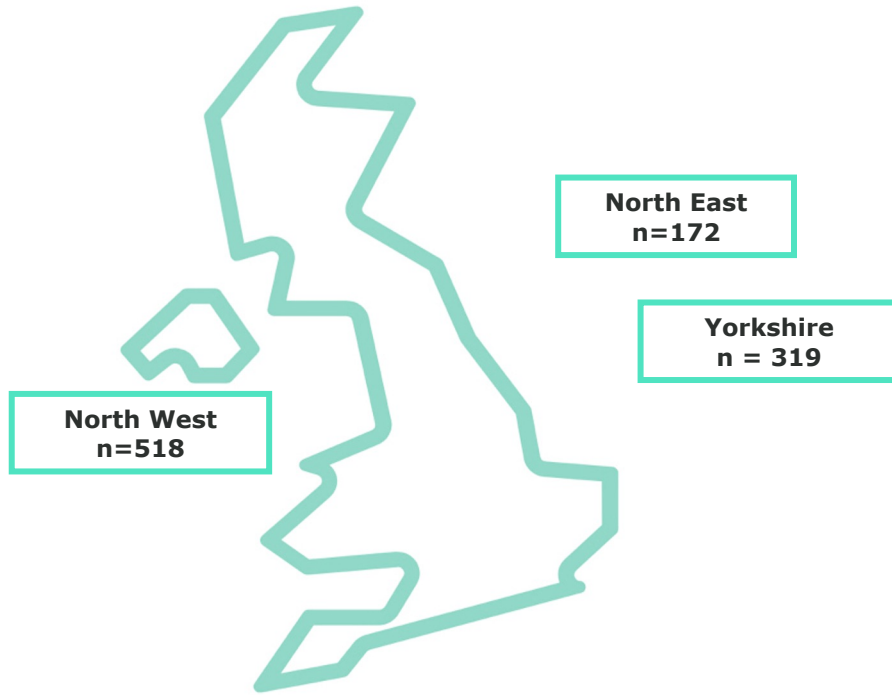
x 14 with a LTHC or disability



x 23 rare users of green space
x 19 medium users of green space
x 15 high users of green space

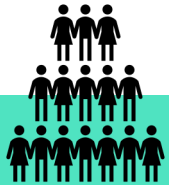
Public participation overview (qualitative)

1009 members of the public took part in the quantitative component of research, in urban environments (urban / semi-urban) across the following 3 regions*:



*Regions are defined in line with census data.

Interpreting the different types of public data



Quantitative

The quantitative data in this research shows us where the public in the North of England sits in its views and attitudes towards green spaces.

These views are without the additional context, information or inspiration that was given to the members of the public who took part in the qualitative research.



Qualitative

Qualitative data in this research shows us how the public in the North of England feel about green spaces once they have been given additional inspiration on the possibilities of green spaces, as well as the time and space to deliberate on the topic.

Throughout this report, we use the following terms...



The public:

This refers to our public audience in the research, which is urban and semi-urban residents of Northern towns and cities.

15 minutes:

This refers to a 15 minute walk or wheelchair journey from home.

2. Key findings and recommendations



Public: Summary of key findings

Green spaces play a fundamental role in urban living. 73% of the public report living within 15 minutes of at least 6 different types of green spaces, while 68% report using the green spaces within 15 minutes of them at least once a week or more.

The public report high satisfaction with the green spaces within 15 minutes of where they live. A large majority (70%+) are satisfied with each of the quality and upkeep, the amount, and the variety of green space in their local area. Those who are less satisfied tend to have less variety of green space nearby.

Despite this, satisfaction is neither universal nor evenly spread. The quality, amount and variety of green spaces is seen by the public to be unequal both across the North in general and within individual towns and cities. Survey data supports this, with those from ethnic minority backgrounds and those from lower socio-economic grades show lower levels of satisfaction than their counterparts.

Green spaces are seen to deliver an array of personal, community and social benefits, including mental and physical wellbeing, socialising and positive environmental impacts.

Coastlines, public parks, woods and street greenery are felt to have the biggest positive impact for those living near them. Qualitatively, the drivers of positivity focus on large multi-use spaces that support a wide variety of interests and activities; pleasant, restful spaces (often including proximity to water), and wild spaces.

Furthermore, when probed the public identify clear areas for improvement in their local spaces. These include a perceived lack of facilities and seating, poorly maintained greenery and footpaths, and issues with antisocial behaviour. The public feel that improvements in these areas would enable more types of people to spend more time in green spaces.

Stakeholder: Summary of key findings

Stakeholders are strong advocates for green spaces, identifying benefits that go far beyond those raised by the public.

Stakeholders discuss the role of green spaces in establishing towns and cities as economically and socially competitive, further environmental benefits including biodiversity and flood risk management, social cohesion and the opportunity green spaces offer for urban infrastructure, travel and connectivity.

Stakeholders also cite a number of improving areas within the sector. Improving areas include a critical mass of expert, passionate and committed professionals; a rapidly improving evidence base for the benefits of green space; a growing consensus on the direction of travel (in particular away from 'manicured greenery' and towards greater wild and natural spaces).

And make note of a number of positive project examples. Examples include projects that have successfully worked with local communities, have overcome funding barriers, created ambitious targets, and worked at scale.

However, stakeholders are also acutely aware of the challenges holding back the development and improvement of green spaces. These include funding challenges (both availability of funds, and the way funds are distributed); challenges relating to land use: including the limited land available and the conflicts in how to use land; and finally organisational/sectoral challenges, which is leading to a lack of unified vision for the sector.

Key to their challenges is being able to ensure their work and enthusiasm can gain traction. Unlike the public, stakeholders have strong awareness of the array of possibilities, from green corridors to health-led initiatives, and are eager to see more innovative work across the North. However, they feel isolated and unclear on how to realise the benefits of green spaces and to drive systemic impact.

The full potential for green spaces across the North is being held back by a combination of factors

There is **little pressure for ambitious improvement** from the general public, the majority of whom are broadly satisfied with their local green spaces.

Those who report lower satisfaction and higher demand for improvement are often **facing other challenges** in their lives and neighbourhoods

In the absence of clear public demand for improvement, and with ever-tighter budgets, Local Government in the North tends to **focus resources elsewhere.**

Stakeholders are convinced of the potential, but feel **isolated and unclear on how to realise the benefits** of green space.

Green space tends to be seen as a 'pleasant' aspect of local life. There is little latent demand for significant improvement. Even those who are less satisfied, or who have lower access, tend to see other more pressing priorities in their lives and communities.

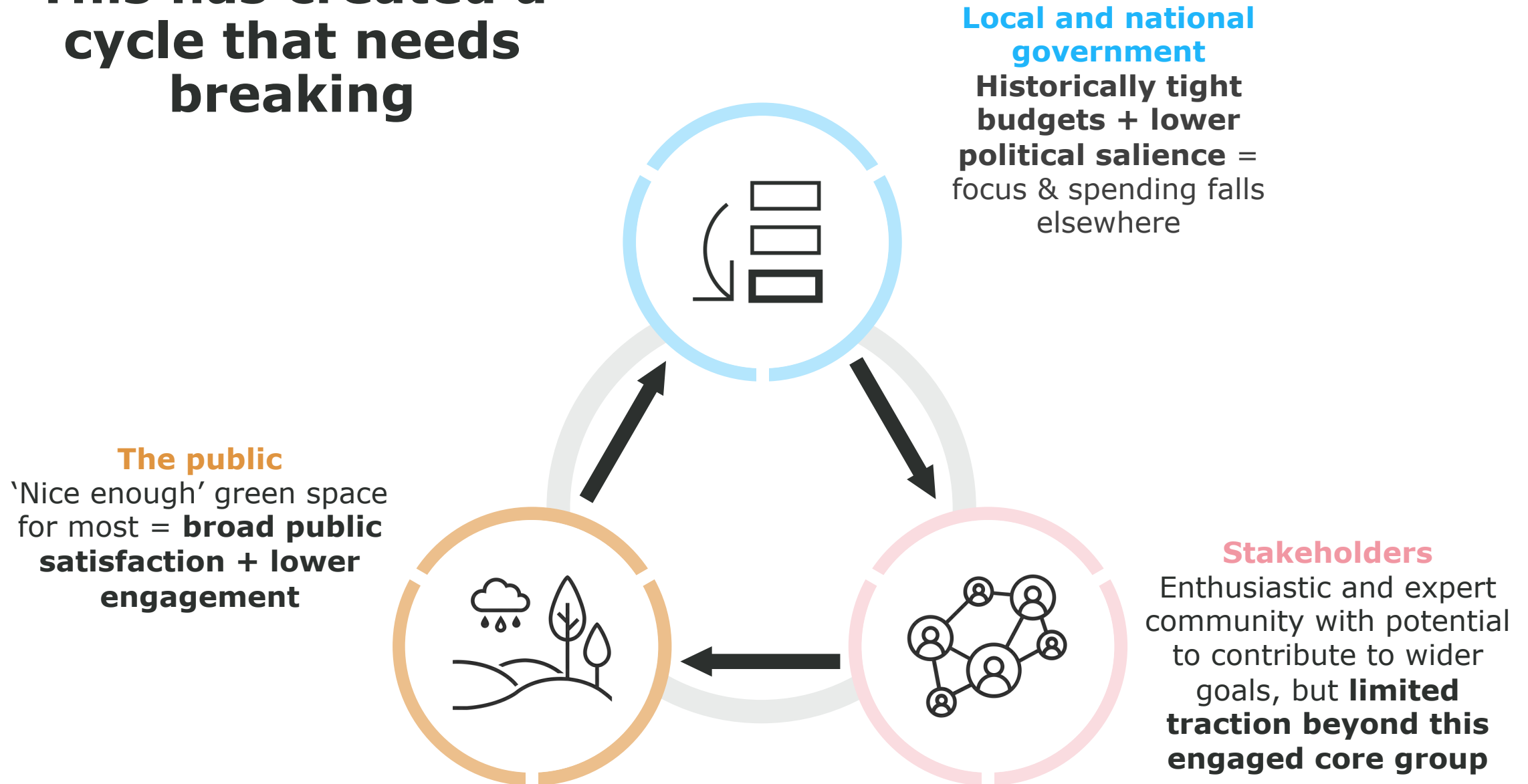
Facing other challenges such as anti-social behaviour and economic decline, these groups tend to prioritise tackling these issues over improving green spaces. Still these underserved groups see improving green spaces as something that should be made a priority for the benefit of the community.

Local Government stakeholders describe significant budgetary challenges, which means officials with a passion for green spaces find it hard to get traction outside of their teams. This creates challenges in securing long term funding and resources, including staff.

Many feel frustrated at the isolated examples of success.

The biggest challenges to getting ideas off the ground include funding issues, an absence of a clear vision for the region and difficulties in bringing parties together to create momentum and effectively work together.

This has created a cycle that needs breaking



This research identifies a number of insights that could help unlock the power of green space for people, communities and nature in Northern Towns and cities:

There is widespread support for addressing inequalities in access and improving the quality of green space across towns and cities in the North

Public passion, interest, ambition and engagement increases when people are given time and space to focus on green space near their homes

Stakeholders feel there is untapped potential for cross-sector working

Stakeholders across local government, the wider sector and beyond see public engagement with green space as a key factor in delivering change

To facilitate more ambitious change across the region, local engagement needs to be guided by a joined-up, strategic plan for the North

These insights point towards three interlinked roles for partners and leaders in the North:

Convening and coordinating to join up activity across towns and cities; share best practice; and drive policy change at regional and national levels

Targeting activity and resources to ensure the focus is on the areas in the North with the lowest access to green space, and the highest social need for it



Piloting and rolling out new models of very local engagement, co-creation and activation

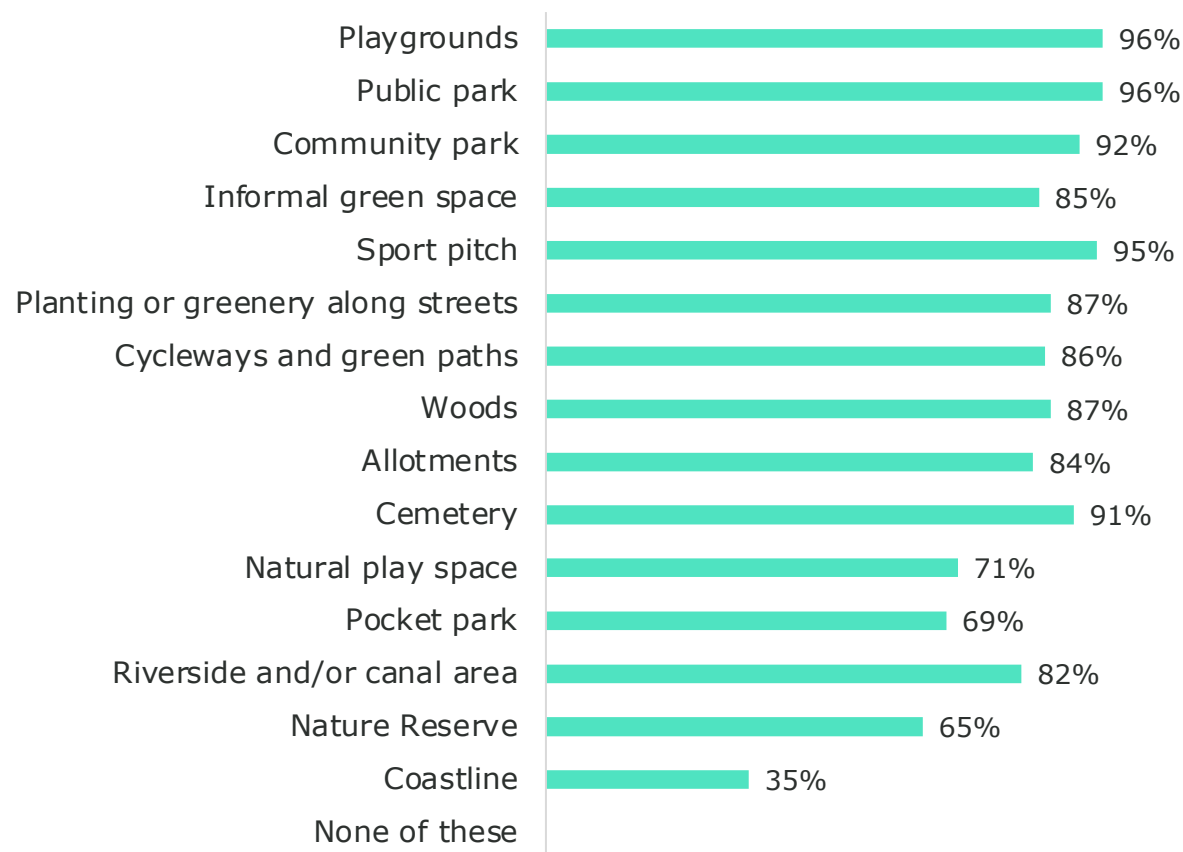
3. Public views of urban green spaces



Access & usage

The public in the North report a wide variety of green space in their town or city

Access to different types of green spaces in their town/city



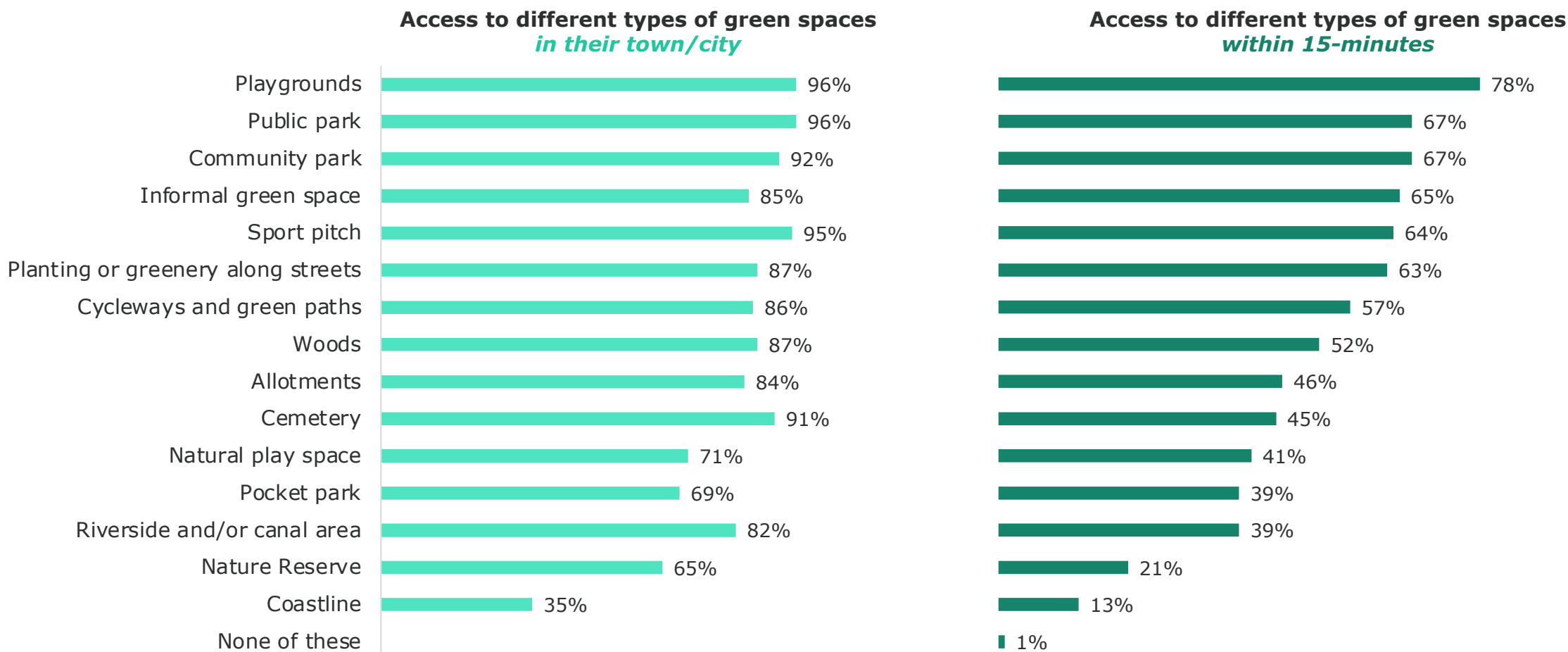
In a qualitative setting, participants also report having a good variety of local green spaces, using different spaces for different kinds of activities, for example local parks for dog walking, sports pitches for exercise, and woodlands for spending time in nature.

"There's lots of green space around – numerous parks, and Speke Hall. And over the water on the Wirral there's numerous parks. So within a 30-minute radius there's a hell of a lot of green spaces available."

Public, Liverpool

**NB there is some disparity between public survey data and National Trust mapping data, which suggests less availability of green spaces in some areas. This is due to different definitions and measures used.*

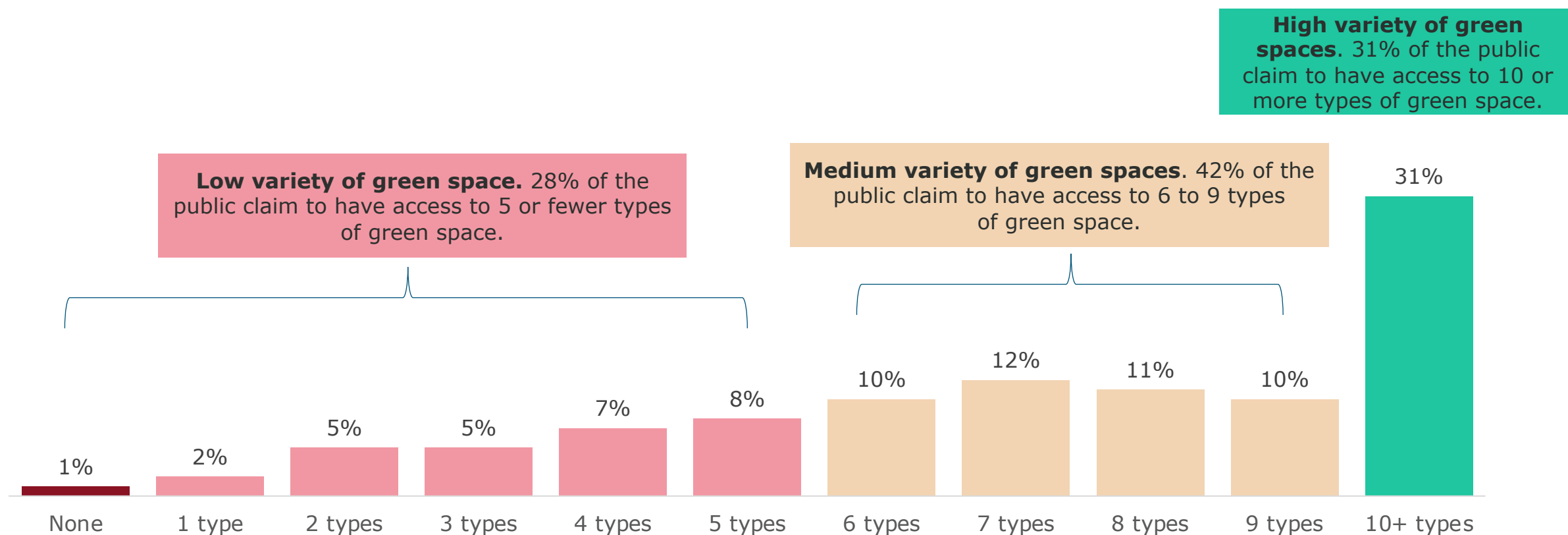
Variation is greater when considering the area within 15 minutes of home



Q. As far as you are aware, please say whether there is one or more of each of the following types of green space in the following areas. For each, please say whether you are aware of one or more within a 15 minute walk or wheelchair journey from your home, in your town or city, but more than 15 minutes away, or if there isn't one in your town/city. Base: All who have a green space within 15 minutes of their home (n=992)

73% of the public say they live within 15 minutes of at least 6 types of green space

Within 15-minute walking/wheeling distance from their home, people in the North of England have



Those with a lower variety of green spaces tend to be younger and more urban

28% low variety of green spaces within 15 minutes

More likely to:

- Live in larger urban areas (30%), vs semiurban areas (25%).
- Live in Yorkshire (30%), vs North East (20%) and North West (28%).
- Be of ethnic minority background (41%), vs those of white ethnic background (26%).
- Be between 18-30 years old (34%) vs 31-45 years old (30%), 46-60 years old (22%), 61+ years old (25%)
- Have a physical or mental health condition (34%), vs no condition (25%).

42% medium variety of green spaces within 15 minutes

More likely to:

- Be 61+ years old (47%) vs 18-30 and 31-45 years old, 46-60 years old (41%)

31% high variety of green spaces within 15 minutes

More likely to:

- Live in semiurban areas (35%), vs urban areas (27%).
- Live in the North East (40%), vs North West (26%) and Yorkshire (27%).
- Be of white ethnic background (33%), vs those with an ethnic minority background (16%).
- Be between 46-60 years old (37%) vs 18-30 years old (26%), 31-45 (30%), 61+ years old (28%).

The specific geography of different Northern towns and cities also impact views of access to green spaces

Darwen

Participants speak with pride about their town's proximity to the countryside, and its similarity to rural areas in parts. They praise its walks and the views from Darwen tower.

Gateshead

Gateshead's parks and interconnecting pathways/cycleways receive praise from residents, despite the fact that they feel green spaces in the urban centres are somewhat lacking.

Liverpool

Liverpudlians talk about their local green spaces with enthusiasm, praising both the range of types they have access to, including the coast, and the quality of these spaces.



Bolton

Participants mainly refer to Bolton's public parks and sports pitches when describing its green spaces, claiming that for more natural spaces they visit Bolton's surrounding countryside.

Bradford

Participants mainly refer to the woods and moorlands that surround Bradford, stating that smaller urban parks are in poor condition and often feel unsafe due to anti-social behaviour.

Hull

Participants tend to access Hull's surrounding green spaces and coastlines, praising its quality. Better green spaces in central Hull is seen as a top priority.

The specific geography of different Northern towns and cities also impact views of access to green spaces

Darwen

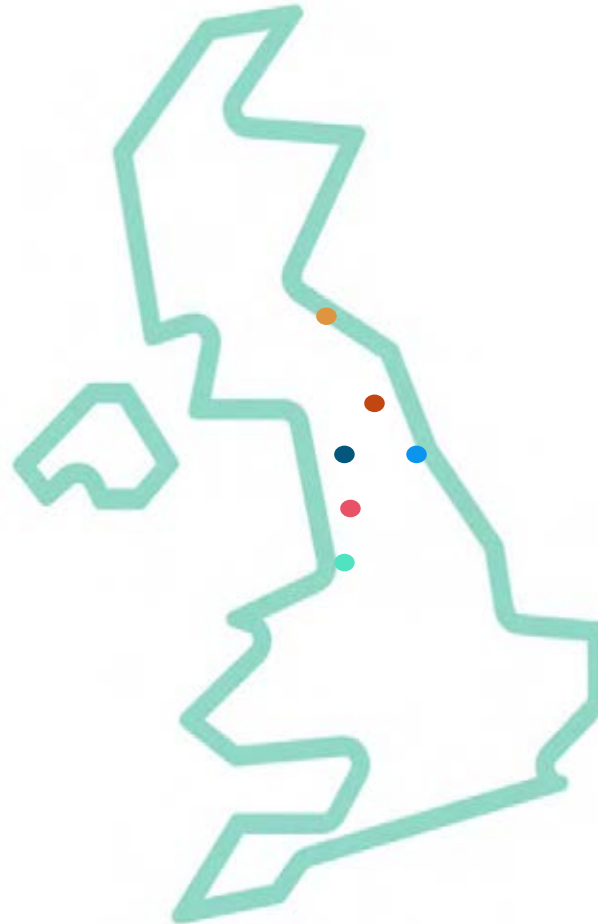
"Probably the only [green spaces] we don't have are the cycle lanes, and green paths we don't do so well on... and coastlines."

Gateshead

"It's all quite connected by cycleways, you could walk like 10 miles in Gateshead... from cycle ways and paths."

Liverpool

"[We have] everything really, for me, we're surrounded by it from woods to coastline, obviously. Nature sites, we could go to."



Bolton

"All the woods I can think of are on the other side of the border that says 'Welcome to Darwen'. So they are close to me but that's because I live right on the edge."

Bradford

"There's a little field, but there's nothing on it, not really maintained. There's some teenagers but I don't walk back that way... I just don't feel safe."

Hull

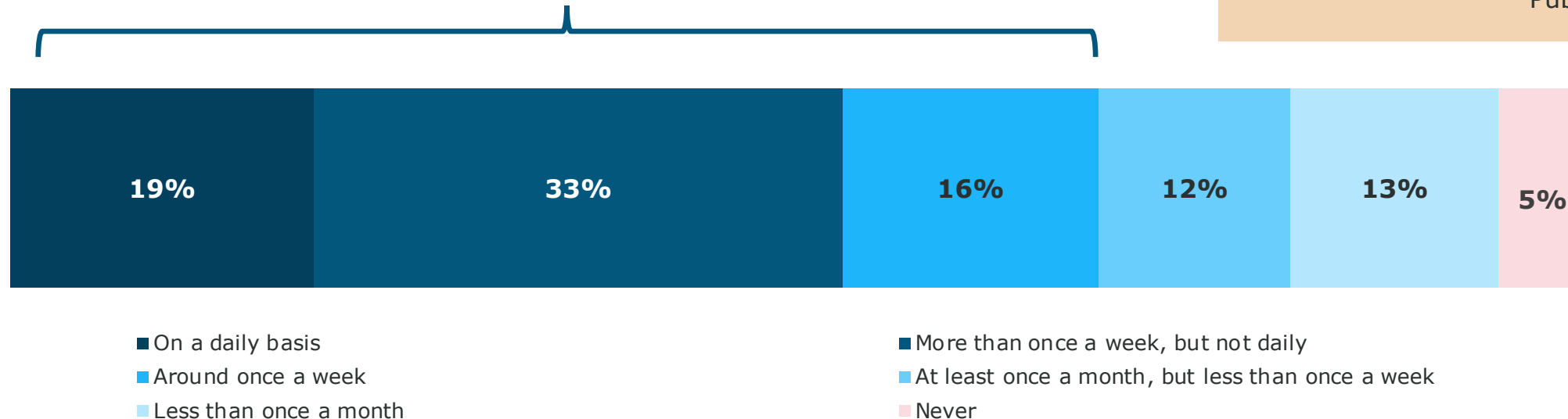
"[We like] the accessibility, we've got quite a few green areas near us and they are all within walking distance."

Two thirds of the public claim to use green spaces once a week or more, with 19% using them daily

Frequency of time using / spending time in green spaces within 15 minutes from home
% who selected each answer option

68% use / spend time in green spaces near to them once a week or more.

"We use them on a regular basis and they are usually just nice places to visit. we appreciate the freedom and pleasure of being outdoors."
Public, Gateshead



Dog owners and parents are among the most intense users; socio-economic background and variety of green space also play a role

68%

of the public use green space within a 15 minute walk or wheelchair journey of their homes at least once a week...

Dog owners	83%
Parents of children	81%
High variety of green space	80%
Socio-economic grade AB	70%
Socio-economic grade DE	59%
Low variety of green space	52%

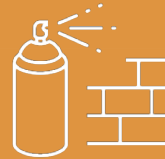


There is public recognition that green spaces are not equal across the North

The quality, amount and variety of green space is seen by the public to be unequal across the North in general, and within individual towns and cities, in line with other signifiers of economic and social deprivation.



There is a perception that low-income areas often have worse green spaces when compared to more affluent areas. Such places are seen to have less green space overall, and those that are there are felt to be in worse condition.



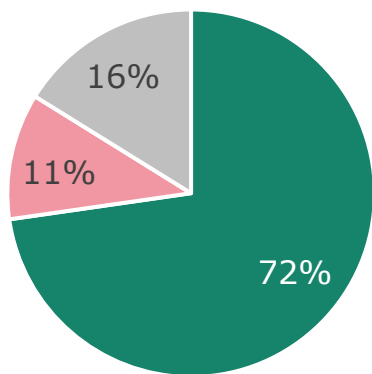
Unequal access to green space is felt to contribute to social inequality – reducing people's ability to stay fit and healthy and heightening the likelihood that green spaces are affected by crime and/or anti-social behaviour.

"If they had some cricket or football pitches, or any sport facilities... then maybe there'd be no antisocial [behaviour], but just these spaces, there's not enough."

Public, Bradford

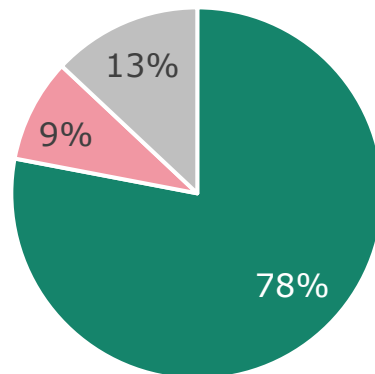
Satisfaction with and views of green spaces

The public report high satisfaction with the quality, amount and variety of green space in their area



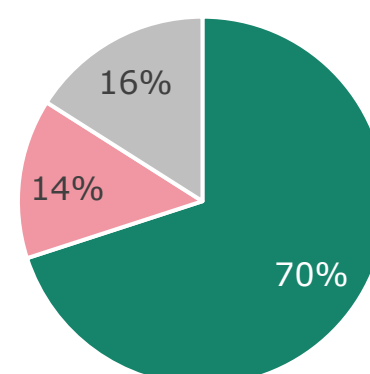
72% of the public are very or fairly satisfied with the **overall quality and upkeep of green spaces within 15 minutes of where they live.**

"I really can't think of anything bad. There is something for everyone and who can't love a big open beautiful green space."
Public, Liverpool



78% of the public are very or fairly satisfied with the **amount of green space available to them/their family within 15 minutes of where they live.**

"There are several green spaces in the local area which is one reason why we chose to move here. We really enjoy being outdoors and wanted to explore the areas on our daily walks."
Public, Gateshead



70% of the public are very or fairly satisfied with the **variety of green space available to them/their family within 15 minutes of where they live.**

"There are multiple choices [of green spaces] all offering a similar but slightly different experience, with some clearly gaining more attention than others."
Public, Liverpool

Q: Thinking about the green space within a 15-minute walk or wheelchair journey from your home, how satisfied or dissatisfied are you with each of the following? Base: All respondents with a green space within 15-minutes of their home (n=992). Overall quality: net satisfied (n=711), net dissatisfied (n=113), neither satisfied nor dissatisfied (n=157), don't know (n=9).; Amount: net satisfied (n=772), net dissatisfied (n=91), neither satisfied nor dissatisfied (n=124), don't know (n=3); Variety: net satisfied (n=692), net dissatisfied (n=134), neither satisfied nor dissatisfied (n=160), don't know (n=4).

Green spaces are felt to deliver a wide range of benefits, from personal to community to societal

Benefits have been amplified by the pandemic, which has strengthened appreciation of green spaces. They include:



Improving physical health, through both formal and informal exercise.



Improving mental health and wellbeing, both due to the associated benefits of physical activity and the general benefits of being outside / in nature.



Offering a free and accessible place to socialise with others.



Giving access to certain facilities and activities e.g. sports pitches or courts, particularly for young people.



Delivering a sense of community cohesion, inclusion and belonging.



Contributing positively to a sense of place in local areas.



Supporting local wildlife and natural habitats, as well as delivering broader environmental benefits to urban environments.

Personal

Community

Societal

As well as being a daily or weekly activity, green spaces hold significant meaning, often forming core memories

*"My husband and I went on a lovely walk through Saltwell park to celebrate the winter solstice. **It was quite cold but it felt very fresh and it was wonderful to be able to spend a few hours outdoors in the fresh air, this was beneficial for us both as well as the baby. We were also able to take the opportunity to birdwatch and research all of the flowers/plants/trees** that were still blooming despite it being winter. There were several other people also out on walks so it was nice to be able to socialise and speak to people we had never met before but were frequent visitors to the park. We also enjoyed watching the squirrels collecting nuts and bulbs for the colder days."*

Public, Gateshead

"COVID-19 helped people discover new places around them and they're still using them now."

Public, Gateshead

***"I remember a few years back and there was a fantastic old-school rock festival in the local park I attended with my friends and it was just the perfect setting!** It was wonderful and hot, and the grass was well looked after just made relaxing in the field with music a really great experience."*

Public, Hull

"We had such a lovely day in the walled garden in the Moss Bank park in summer."

It was a lovely sunny day. Our girls ran around the garden for a good hour admiring the variety of plants and bugs while my friend and I sat on a bench chatting."

Public, Bolton

*"I enjoyed time in a local park with my sister and two of her grandchildren. It was a sunny breezy day and it was enjoyable to enjoy. **Time with family in the fresh air and taking exercise at the same time."***

Public, Bradford

*"I had the most wholesome day! We had planned this family walk a few weeks in advance with my parents, sister, brothers, cousins, grandma and all the boyfriends etc. to all get a date we were free. We all met at my house and drove in conga to Delamere forest. The weather was gorgeous; cold but the bright sunshine kissing my cheeks... **It was so lovely to just walk and feel so fresh whilst catching up with all my family and talking about so many different things."***

Public, Liverpool

Saltaire, Leeds and Liverpool Canal, Bradford



"Roberts Park, Saltaire – so you can walk along the canal, go along the river, go on the moor, you can get to a lot of places from there."
Public, Bradford

Darwen Jubilee Tower, Darwen



"We have our tower that is a symbol for the town, it's also meeting point for community for special events, like at New Year."
Public, Darwen

Palm House, Sefton Park, Liverpool



"We also have hidden gems, like the botanical gardens and the Palm House in Sefton Park."
Public, Liverpool

Queens Park Bolton nature trail, Bolton



"Queens and Mossbank park in particular are well used with cafés, sports facilities, activities for kids, including a nature trail."
Public, Bolton

Beverly Westwood, Hull



"I use the open spaces outside of Hull, the fields...They are great for walking."
Public, Hull

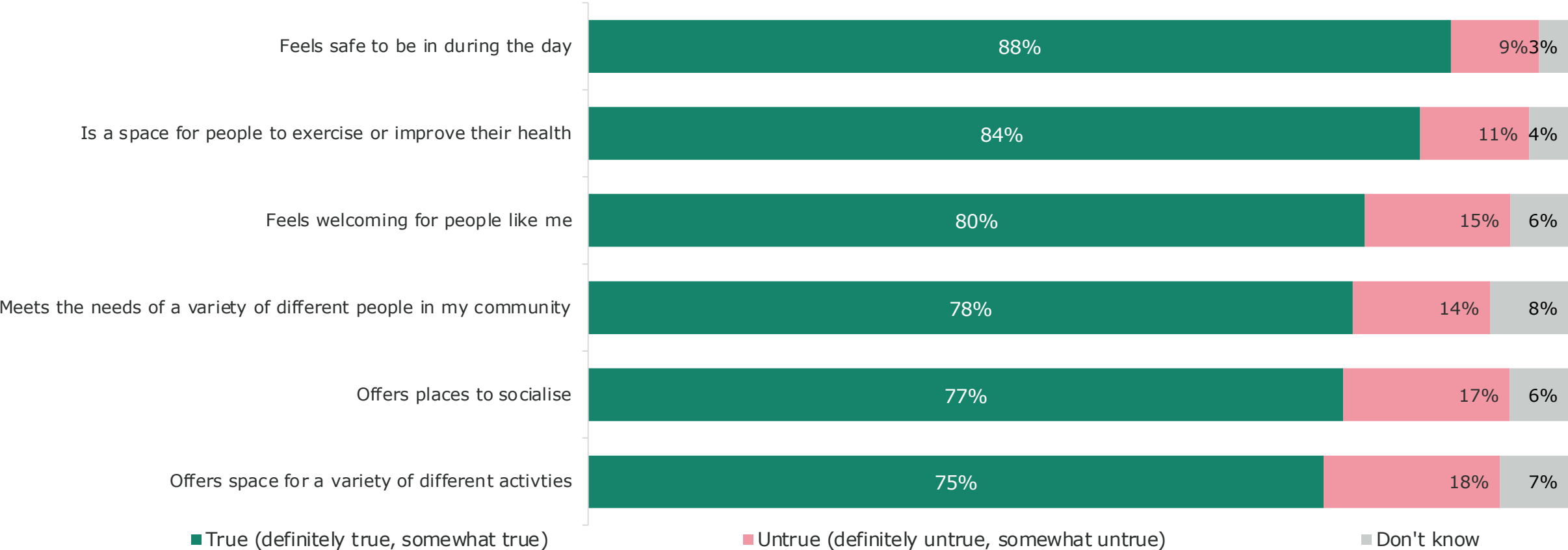
Cycle Routes, Gateshead



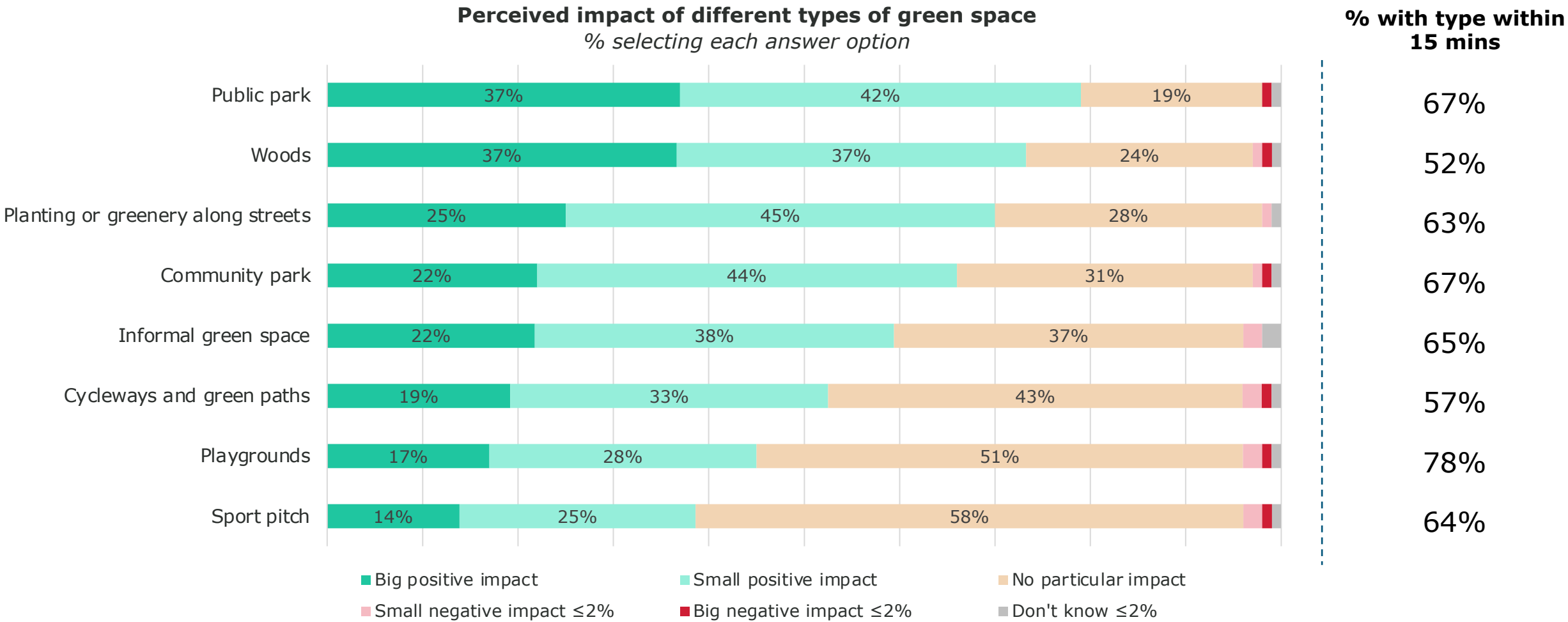
"It's all quite connected, by cycleways, you could walk like 10 miles in Gateshead, using just cycle ways and paths."
Public, Gateshead

Residents overwhelmingly see the green space available to them as safe, welcoming and social

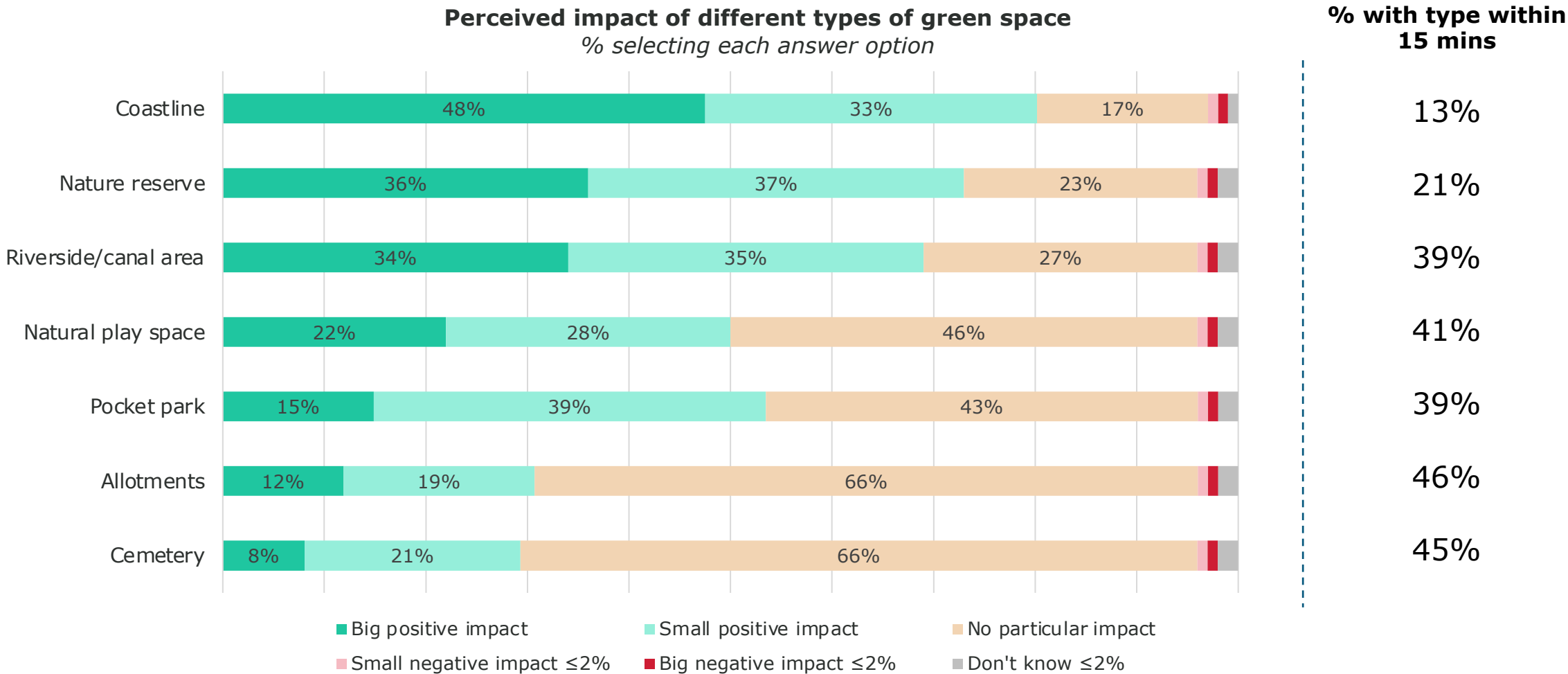
What green spaces have to offer within 15-minute walking/wheeling distance
% selecting each answer option



Of the most prevalent types of green space, public parks, woods and street greenery are felt to have the biggest positive impact



Among the less prevalent types, coastlines, nature reserves and riverside areas have the most positive impact on those with access



A series of factors – relating to the usability, aesthetic and feel of a place – drive positive impact

The following factors are most important in driving positive impact of green spaces:

Large, multi functional spaces, such as parks, which allow for a variety of different activities and uses

Activities for children, such as playgrounds, which are particularly important for parents. 86% of those with children under 10 say that playgrounds have a positive impact on their lives

Places for exercise are important for those who engage in regular team sports and / or personal fitness

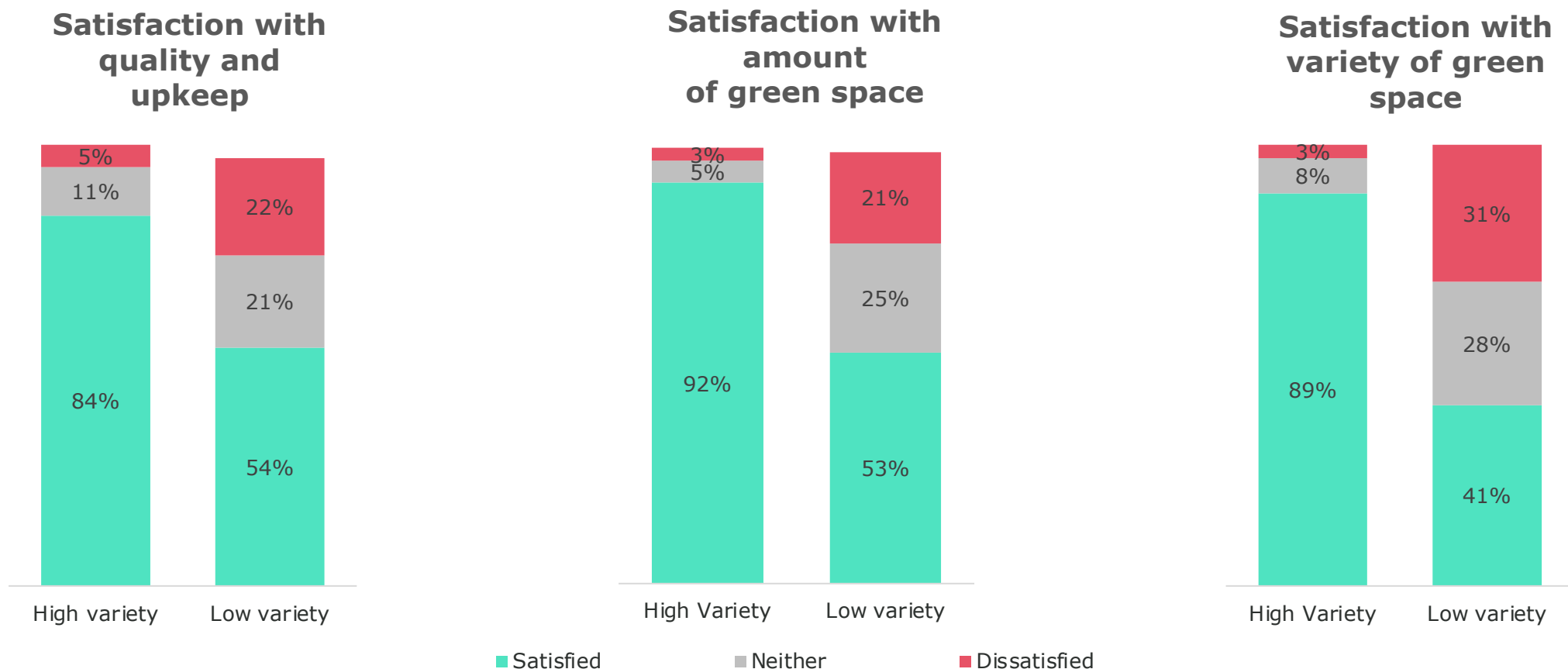
Spaces that include access to water, are viewed particularly positively due to the positive associations of water with peace and calmness, as well as its potential for activities e.g. surfing, kayaking

Spaces that provide tranquility and calmness are well liked for their ability to provide a sanctuary from the business of urban living

Spaces that soften the urban landscape, providing a welcome visual break in otherwise built up or concrete environments

There is a clear association between satisfaction levels and the variety of green space available within 15 mins

Satisfaction with green space varies in line with access to different types of green spaces:



Satisfaction with local green space varies with socio-economic grade, and ethnic background

	Quality and upkeep	
	Satisfied	Dissatisfied
61+ years old	78%	8%
Socio-economic grade AB	74%	13%
White ethnicity	73%	11%
31-45 years old	69%	16%
Ethnic minority	64%	16%
Socio-economic grade DE	67%	12%



N.B. Table shows satisfaction scores for quality and upkeep of green space within 15 minutes of your home. Satisfaction with other factors (amount/variety) vary in very similar ways.

The public research revealed that green spaces are often one of the more positive aspects of urban neighbourhoods. They are pleasant amenities, used frequently, but rarely considered in much depth. This surface level 'nice enough' perception likely underpins the high satisfaction seen in the quantitative data.

Nonetheless, when residents are given the opportunity to consider their local green space in more depth, it becomes clear that there is opportunity for improvement.

Frustrations with local green space focus on 'the basics': upkeep, safety and usability

Most mentioned

The poor maintenance of both greenery, walkways and facilities within green spaces.

A lack of facilities, including lack of accessible toilets and cafés.

A lack of good quality lighting and/or security cameras.

Antisocial behaviour and crime.

A lack of different seating options.

Missed opportunities for green spaces to play a bigger role in local communities.

Poor maintenance and facilities can reduce the amount of time people spend in green spaces



Poor maintenance is felt to apply to footpaths, greenery and facilities such as toilets, as well as the general issue of litter, which impacts both the visual appeal and experience of being in green spaces.

25% of the public think it is definitely or somewhat true that their green spaces are scruffy and badly maintained.

"More maintenance, especially on the paths. Some are showing signs of water erosion and could feasibly lead to someone having an accident."

Public, Darwen



A lack of facilities includes a lack of accessible toilets and cafés or other places to purchase food and drink.

More than half of the public thinks it is definitely or somewhat untrue that their local green spaces provide accessible toilets (55%) and offer good places to get food and drink (52%).

"The playing field near me has no facilities, not enough bins and is not securely fenced."

Public, Hull

Perceived safety issues can restrict the amount of time the public spend in green spaces



A lack of good quality lighting and/or security cameras can make green spaces feel unsafe after dark. This means that many only use green spaces during the day.

49% of the public believes it is definitely untrue or somewhat untrue that local green spaces feel safe after dark. This is highest amongst females (54% vs 44% of males).

"It's not a place I would feel safe to walk when it gets dark."

Public, Liverpool



48% of the public believes it is true that local green spaces have problems with antisocial behaviour.

Antisocial behaviour is mainly perceived in the form of groups of people (often younger people) who can feel intimidating to others. Such groups may not actually be causing harm to others but are simply perceived negatively.

"A couple of local parks have antisocial behaviour that is difficult to tackle with the lack of local police/security on the ground."

Public, Gateshead

Lack of seating and activities for all groups can impact who is able to enjoy green spaces to their full potential



A lack of different seating options can make it more challenging to socialise in green spaces, which is particularly a problem with older people, or those with a physical disability or mobility issue.

77% of the public believes it is true that green spaces offer places to socialise. There is a desire therefore to see this maximised through additional places to sit.

"[We need more] benches in place for people to sit and chat - I think green spaces need to be a place for people to be able to come together and socialise."

Public, Darwen



Many believe there are missed opportunities for green spaces to play a bigger role in local communities, particularly as positive environments for young people.

This ties to perceived views of anti-social behaviour: some note that younger people may be forced to simply 'hang out' in green spaces due to a lack of other things to do.

"For me as a dad, when my son was younger, having access to playgrounds and outdoor spaces was really important. I think every community has a right and should have those as a given."

Public, Bolton



4. Stakeholder views of urban green spaces

Benefits and success stories of green spaces

Stakeholders see benefits of green spaces that go beyond those recognised by the public

As well as the benefits referenced by the public, stakeholders also cite:



The role of green spaces in establishing towns and cities as economically and socially competitive, including bringing in inward investment.

"This is about making the North competitive – we want our communities to be attractive, where people want to be and can flourish."

Stakeholder, Local Authority



Further environmental benefits, including biodiversity, natural flood risk management, cooling and heat capture, contributing to net zero and improving air quality.

"Surface permeability - we massively underestimate the value that urban green space has in reducing localised flooding."

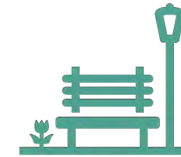
Stakeholder, Environment



Further community benefits, including greater social cohesion and creating spaces of belonging and providing a catalyst for greater civic participation.

"Where do you start when the list [of benefits] is so huge? Probably community cohesion, bringing diverse communities together."

Stakeholder, Local Authority



How important good green spaces are in low-income areas, as they offer much needed outside space, reduce isolation and improve health outcomes, all issues that are more likely to be prevalent in these areas.

"Those from lower economic areas are in general less active and don't go to formal leisure provision, therefore having green spaces close to home is vital."

Stakeholder, Health



The opportunity green spaces offer for CSR and filling environmental requirements for developers, landowners and corporates.

"On all our developments we put in new parks – it cost millions, but our experience is they come back to us in terms of desirability."

Stakeholder, Regeneration

Stakeholders cite several things going well in the sector



Passion and creativity within the sector

Stakeholders recognise that there are lots of engaged, creative and passionate organisations and individuals working in this area, who are committed to finding ways to improve urban green spaces despite the challenging context.



Growing understanding and recognition of green space benefits

Although generating the quantitative evidence needed for funding applications can be a challenge, it is believed that there is growing evidence for the benefits of green spaces. In particular, the importance of green spaces for health and for managing the challenges of a changing climate are increasingly recognised.



Growing willingness for less manicured spaces

While there is still room for growth, stakeholders see some movement away from a manicured style of 'grass and lollypop tree' park design, towards designs that provide more benefits for the environment and wildlife.

Stakeholders also identify a series of 'exemplar' projects where challenges of funding and collaboration have been overcome

Working with local communities



Finding creative ways to navigate funding challenges



Creating ambitious targets



Working at scale



These examples are detailed on the following slides



Some have had success in engaging local people and meeting local needs

Community design

Putting communities or target audiences at the heart of design can mean green spaces are more suitable for local needs and inclusivity. E.g., Valence Park in East London was redesigned using community co-design.

Collaboration between sectors

Better collaboration between local authorities, communities, NGOs and the private sector to ensure developments deliver green spaces to fit local needs. E.g., the New Islington project where developers worked closely with these groups.

Community engagement

Some projects are managing to tackle multiple problems in one. E.g., Stockton-on-Tees project to bring green space to the high street, bringing environmental, social and economic benefits.



Others have found creative ways to navigate funding challenges

The private sector

Harnessing private sector funding to help achieve public and environmental goals. E.g. The Rivers Trust used private sector money to pay landowners to use parts of their land to help reduce flood risk in Bristol.

Creative use of funding

Some projects are using funding efficiently or creatively, especially by making innovative use of the landscape currently there to draw in investment. E.g. the Emscher Landscape Park, Ruhr (Germany).

"In the Emscher park in Ruhr, Germany's park, it's been profoundly cheaper because they didn't demolish everything. They took the places and greened them up and investment is coming back and people are coming back."

If we just look at these places differently, innovatively and transforming them."

Stakeholder,
Environment



Some initiatives have been ambitious about the benefits green spaces could deliver

Green developments

Developments can not only fulfil biodiversity net gains, but have green space as the heart of their plan and a main selling point. E.g., Lilac Grove in Leeds, a co-housing eco-development that is both sustainable and affordable.

Innovation

Flood-risk management is becoming increasingly innovative. E.g., Severn Trent Water's collaborative work in Mansfield using innovative methods to reduce the risk of flooding.

Solving multiple problems

Some projects are managing to tackle multiple problems in one. E.g., Stockton-on-Tees project to bring green space to the high street, bringing environmental, social and economic benefits.



While others have succeeded at working at scale

Green mapping in cities

Some towns or cities are mapping green sites together as part of a wider, holistic approach to developing urban greenery. E.g., Feed Leeds map all available green spaces in Leeds and which food it can grow to maximise program reach.

Local transformation

Some projects have demonstrated large scale change and are praised for their success E.g., Wigan Flashes National Nature Reserve status, in which a former industrial wasteland was transformed.

"Flashes of Wigan and Leigh are examples of what is great we just need more of it. Regenerated coal tips/mines with meadows."

Stakeholder,
Environment

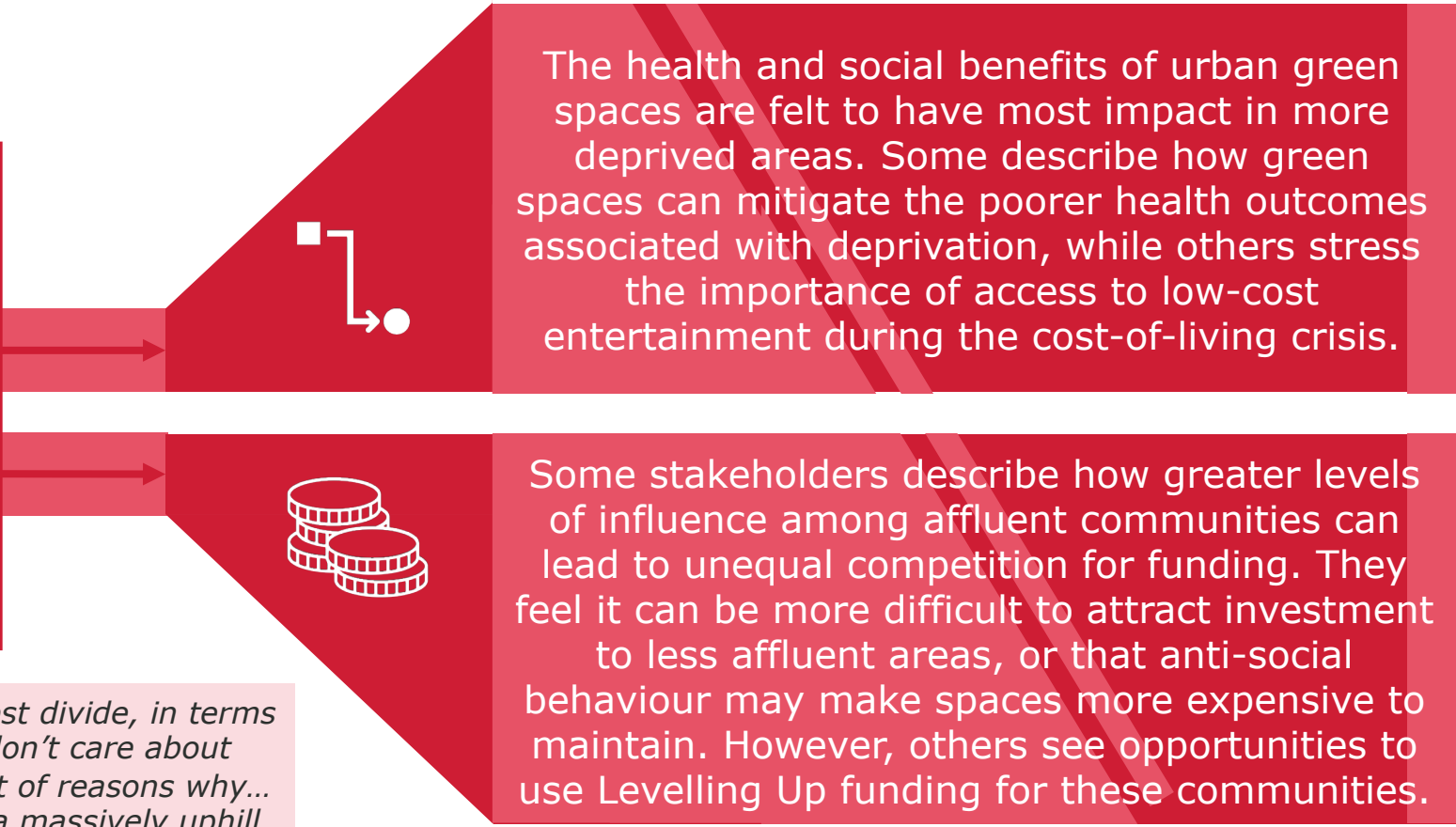
For stakeholders, these examples of great practice, investment and collaboration were seen as the exceptions, rather than the norm.

Despite widespread recognition of the potential of green space to deliver against a range of social and environmental challenges, stakeholders tended to feel that the context is particularly challenging at the moment, and that the green space agenda has little traction beyond a core group of enthusiasts.

Challenges of green space development

Stakeholders echo public concerns about the quality of green spaces in deprived areas

Access to green spaces varies, with deprived areas felt to be losing out most. Stakeholders focus on inequality within their city or region, though some feel there are also discrepancies in funding between regions of the UK.



The health and social benefits of urban green spaces are felt to have most impact in more deprived areas. Some describe how green spaces can mitigate the poorer health outcomes associated with deprivation, while others stress the importance of access to low-cost entertainment during the cost-of-living crisis.



Some stakeholders describe how greater levels of influence among affluent communities can lead to unequal competition for funding. They feel it can be more difficult to attract investment to less affluent areas, or that anti-social behaviour may make spaces more expensive to maintain. However, others see opportunities to use Levelling Up funding for these communities.

"From a Sheffield perspective, we have an East-West divide, in terms of the quality of green spaces. It's not that we don't care about green spaces on the East side, there's a whole host of reasons why... and it's a challenge to increase that equality. It's a massively uphill struggle to find funding, and in poorer communities you have higher levels of antisocial behaviour, so it costs so much more to keep things at that quality."

Stakeholder, Local Authority

There are three core challenges which stakeholders feel are preventing green spaces from reaching their full potential

Challenges relating
to funding



Challenges relating
to land use



Challenges relating
to resources



These challenges are explored in more detail on the following slides



The broader economic climate as well the availability of funding is a top cited challenge

The current financial and political climate is challenging

Green space development is seen to be **less top of mind for some political leaders.**

Green spaces are discretionary rather than statutory for local authorities. Non-local authority stakeholders feel this risks them being deprioritised.

"These are hard times, there's competing priorities. The amount of money is relatively small compared to others."

Stakeholder, Regeneration

There is not enough funding available for green spaces

Funding at a council level is overall felt to be limited, as are grants or other funding avenues.

It can be difficult to evidence the intuitive value of green space in a clear, quantified way, which is felt to hamper access to funding.

"Bluntly it's resources, it's funding. Local authority funding has been slashed by central government, so we've all had cuts."

Stakeholder, Local Authority

Available funding isn't always given in a helpful way

Lots of funding is predominately short term, creating issues with providing longer term maintenance and more innovative workstreams.

Funding prioritises new, rather than existing, green spaces, resulting in a funding-led rather than needs-led system.

"If you get [the funding], you have to spend it the week after that."

Stakeholder, Environment



Limitations in the land available can make balancing competing priorities challenging

There is limited land available, and limited influence over private land

Access to private land is limited, meaning green corridors between green sites are hard to create as footpaths or public rights of way are not common, especially in urban areas.

Land ownership in urban areas is complex. It can be difficult to negotiate and incentivise changes in management methods, especially for private owners.

"There were gaps in those green corridors where say, you go out of the park, and you went onto... an area of public space that wasn't owned by the parks and if we had known that we could have done something in those areas and kept those connections going."

Stakeholder, Local Authority

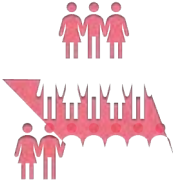
Balancing different priorities for the green spaces available can be complex

It can be challenging to find the right balance in environmental and public needs. This is particularly difficult given that different communities and people have different needs for green spaces, especially under-represented groups such as teenage girls, ethnic minorities, or less affluent groups.

Local authorities experience tension between the development of urban green spaces and their other priorities (such as housing), creating challenges in decision making regarding land use.

"If you can find a balance for how they want to use it and how you might be able to use the edges for nature recovery, then that's where we come in as organisations to try and find that balance, but ultimately it's a neighbourhood space for local people."

Stakeholder, Environment



There is a perceived lack of resources for ambitious change, making innovation risky

There is a perceived lack of resources to develop ambitious vision

A lack of structural mechanisms for collaboration makes it harder to develop projects offering multiple benefits.

Lack of best practise or learning among developers and private sector limits the potential of using developers to do their bit. While successful examples do exist, they are the exception.

"I think there needs to be a culture change within the public sector... we need to be happy to be a partnership for the private sector too and I think a lot of the time the public sector has to be the catalysts for that."

Stakeholder, Environment

There is currently no unifying ambition or vision

Lack of overall vision or city-wide approach between stakeholders, especially local authorities who could work much more closely with the third sector to ensure that towns or cities are viewed as a whole, rather than site-by-site.

"[It'd] be good to have 'a plan' and something to work towards across the North. Need shared vision. Holistic, complicated theories coming together to create something brighter."

Stakeholder, Health

Innovation can feel risky

The high risk of driving change. There is a perceived 'stalemate' where no individual or organisation feels able to undertake bold solutions, in the context of growing distrust among communities, increasing politicisation of green spaces and teams feeling unsupported.

"They want LAs to compete and invest huge amounts of time for speculative bids for money which may or may not be forthcoming and that rarely leads to any great innovation or brilliant projects."

Stakeholder, Environment

Local authority stakeholders identify three particular challenges that impact their work specifically

Funding

A lack of funding affects capacity to deliver high quality green space projects.

Recent budget cuts necessitate difficult choices between other essential local services and green space projects. Local authorities especially mention that finding funding for continued maintenance or permanent staff is a big challenge.

"I think the biggest barrier is cost and capacity... where you have parks with little community activity and engagement, having the capacity to then think about how to support those communities."

Stakeholder, Local Authority

Lack of recognition

Stakeholders report that many in local government fail to recognise the importance of green space delivery. When they have difficult funding related choices, these types of projects are often the first to be cut.

Environment and NGO stakeholders want to see green space to be viewed as an essential service rather than 'nice to have'.

"But councils don't have a legal obligation to manage parks and so their provision is possibly really important."

Stakeholder, Academic

Inconsistency

The inconsistent conditions in local areas, often within the same wider town or city, make it hard to replicate 'good' in areas that need better green space.

This can be because of less private funding, fewer NGOs or volunteer group, or lower local engagement. This is seen to especially affect lower income areas.

"You know, you can get widely differing views between different authorities across the country, and to have that political ambition, and that political leadership, I think is pretty vital."

Stakeholder, Local Authority

As a result, many stakeholders are left feeling stuck and frustrated by a lack of progress

These challenge mean that:

Case studies of good work – while positive – are often isolated examples that are difficult to replicate elsewhere and do not represent systemic impact or change.

Stakeholders struggle to gain traction outside of the inner circle of people already working on and engaged in the topic.

Many feel frustrated by the barriers they face, and are unclear about how to make progress in this area.

Stakeholder engagement on the topic of green spaces is also felt to lack the range required

Environment, NGOs, Academics & Think Tanks

These groups are the most engaged in the topic of green space, and indicate the strongest desire to drive change.

Local Authority

While some local authority stakeholders are highly engaged in the topic of green spaces, they report challenges in getting traction outside of their teams or departments.

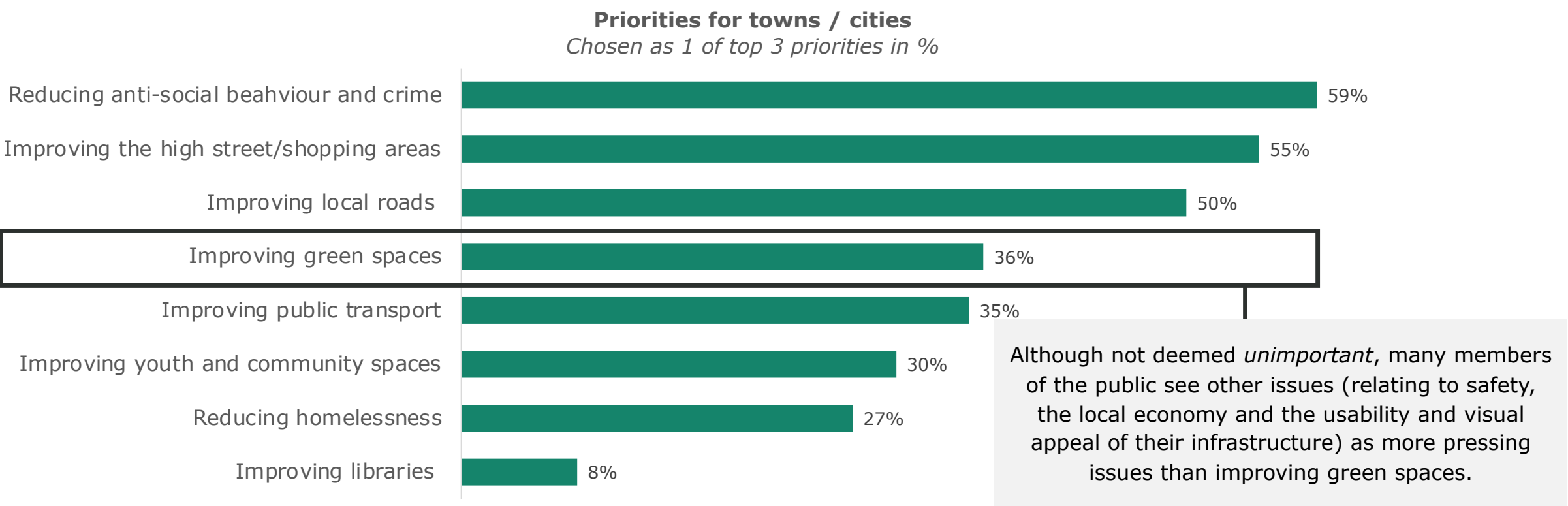
Health & Finance

Health and finance stakeholders were not only the most difficult to engage in the research, but are also the most likely to see green spaces as being part, but not the core, of their work remit.

5. Improving urban green spaces

Support for green space development

In survey results, relative to other local challenges (and reflecting high levels of satisfaction with green space generally), improving green space is rarely the top priority

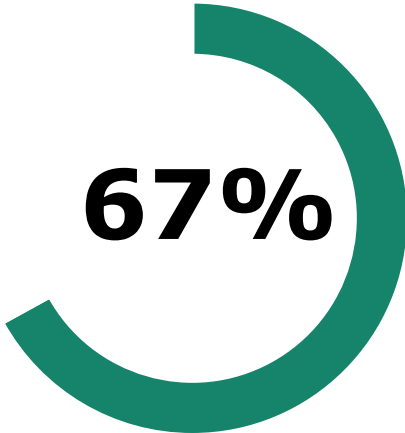


Desire for improvement does rise among those who are least satisfied with green spaces overall

A green gauge chart showing 52% completion, with the percentage value displayed in the center.

52%

Of the public who are very or fairly unsatisfied with the **overall quality and upkeep of green spaces within 15 minutes of where they live**, put improving green space as a top 3 priority where they live. In comparison, 33% of those very or fairly satisfied make this a priority.

A green gauge chart showing 67% completion, with the percentage value displayed in the center.

67%

Of the public who are very or fairly unsatisfied with the **amount of green space available to them/their family within 15 minutes of where they live**, put improving green space as a top 3 priority where they live. In comparison, 32% of those very or fairly satisfied make this a priority.

A green gauge chart showing 57% completion, with the percentage value displayed in the center.

57%

Of the public who are very or fairly unsatisfied with the **variety of green space available to them/their family within 15 minutes of where they live**, put improving green space as a top 3 priority where they live. In comparison, 32% of those very or fairly satisfied make this a priority.

Dissatisfaction with the *amount* of green space correlates most strongly with wanting to see improvements.

Improving local green spaces becomes a priority for the public when they are given greater time and space to engage with ideas

This engagement shifts the public mindset from thinking green space is 'good enough', to considering a wider range of possibilities.

This thinking is best done:

Through a local lens, so the public can think practically about changes to their area.

With inspiration on potential green space initiatives, so the public can consider wider possibilities.

Here, the public become more energised, excited and supportive of green space development.

"Equal access is really important. It makes it easier for people to get to these places especially if they've got big families and no car."

Public, Bradford

"I like very much the education about the green spaces, about the woods. They have to start in primary school, they have to teach kids what is good for us, what is not good for us."

Public, Bolton

Stakeholders are already enthusiastic about the opportunity for green spaces to support wider political agendas

Climate resilience

Including flood management and urban cooling.

Supporting biodiversity

Through planting more trees throughout towns and cities, and implementing more 'wild' spaces.

Health and wellbeing

Including social prescribing and repurposing NHS land into green spaces designed to support mental and physical health.

Broader town and city improvement

Tying work to the Levelling Up agenda, and using green spaces to renew towns and cities, improve pride and boost local economies.

Active travel

For example through the creation of 'green corridors' to be used for walking and cycling.

Stakeholders see local engagement as being key to ensuring success in green space development....

- Basing new initiatives on a genuine understanding of community needs will ensure that they are widely used and valued.
- Public involvement will also result in sense of ownership of spaces, which will help ensure they are looked after over time.

While it is understood that active participation is not for everybody, identifying a core group of engaged resident 'champions' is thought to be key to gaining local traction.

"Not involving local communities in green space programs – you just can't do it. In order to develop successful programs you have to involve local community or there will be no longevity. They are the ones who stand to benefit the most from air quality and access to nature."

Stakeholder, Regeneration

"I think it's just a place for people to chat to their neighbours. Ask them what they're doing with the day and it's a great place to build trust. These are things that are massively undervalued when talking about community strength, and I think social spaces like this play a large role."

Stakeholder, Think-Tank

"Their role in the neighbourhood and to local people is critical. I think meaningful consultation is really important...they say 'you don't know what you don't know' – it's around the messaging and the education."

Stakeholder,
Environment

"Local politicians – one of the most important really in terms of stakeholders. They represent the people. It's important to hear their views, have them involved in co-developing ideas for these particular locations, so they've got ownership so they can inspire and enable their communities to be on board."

Stakeholder,
Local Authority

...but they require support in building momentum

Many stakeholders are already leading various public engagement initiatives.

They feel they have been 'banging this drum' for green spaces for a while, but feel isolated and unclear on how to realise their full benefits.

They require strategic guidance on how to drive change, as well as a broader and more diverse network to support.

Expectations for green space development

Although priorities differ slightly between them, three consistent areas of focus emerge from both the public and stakeholders

Biggest priority for the public

Improving and maintaining current green spaces

Through additional facilities and amenities as well as general maintenance of footpaths, greenery and social areas.

Biggest priorities for stakeholders

Ensuring green spaces enable nature and wildlife to thrive

Through more designated 'wild' areas and initiatives to support growth.

Using green spaces to improve broader community, environmental and health outcomes

Through direct and indirect initiatives.

The public and stakeholders are clear that getting existing green space as good as it can be is top priority

Improving and maintaining current green spaces

Through additional facilities and amenities as well as general maintenance of footpaths, greenery and social areas.

Ensuring green spaces enable nature and wildlife to thrive

Through more designated 'wild' areas and initiatives to support growth.

Using green spaces to improve broader community, environmental and health outcomes

Through direct and indirect initiatives.

The public prioritises investments in existing green spaces ahead of new developments

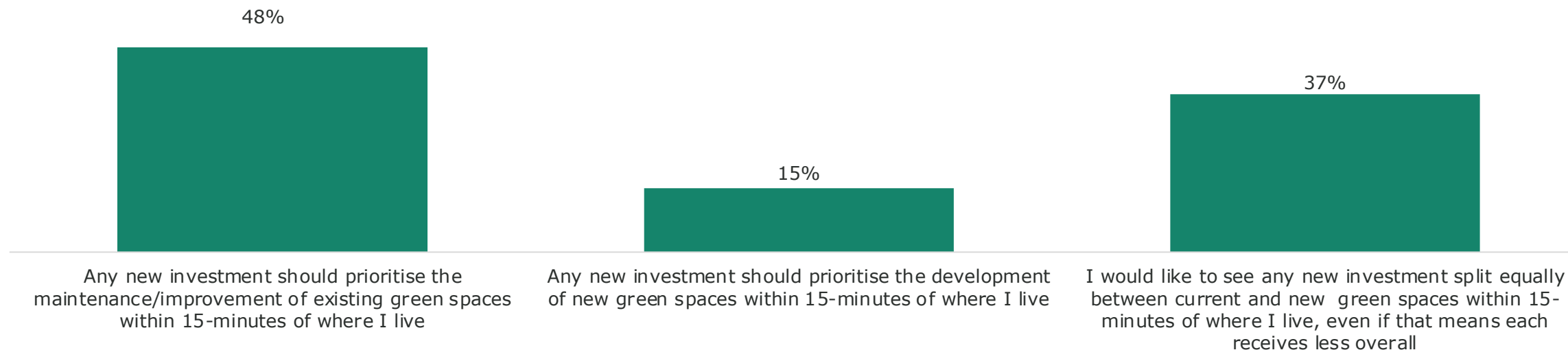
"I would try and improve the green spaces we have first. I think having more available and accessible places will keep encouraging people to utilise the space more. I would want to make it accessible to everyone; all ages. That is important. Then I would want to build and expand the green spaces."

Public, Bradford

"'Right now' wins – tangibility and the sense that something is happening is important. Pledges are too political, and people don't have faith in long-term, bigger plans."

Public, Gateshead

Preferred investment into green spaces
% selecting each approach to investment



Q. When it comes to investing in green spaces within a 15-minute walk or wheelchair journey of where you live, which of the following statements do you most agree with? Base: All who have a green space within 15 minutes of their home (n=992).

The public want to see investment help existing green spaces reach their full potential

- Even after engaging with inspiration on the possibilities of green space, the public prioritise making improvements to current green spaces.
- The public **value the green spaces they know and love**, but some are concerned that these spaces are not fulfilling their potential or are even declining due to underinvestment.
- Most feel that **investing in existing spaces is a more efficient** use of limited funding available.
 - They are very concerned about current funding challenges across local government, and want to maximise the impact of any funding allocated.
- Improving existing parks feels like a **more achievable goal** than creating new spaces, in the context of wariness about the ability of local authorities to deliver ambitious or large-scale projects.

"A lot of the parks have got worse, and the boating lake - they took the boats away because of funding and antisocial behaviour. If you were to watch documentaries of the Victorian age, they were things to be proud of. It was such a beautiful place, and we want the investment back in there."

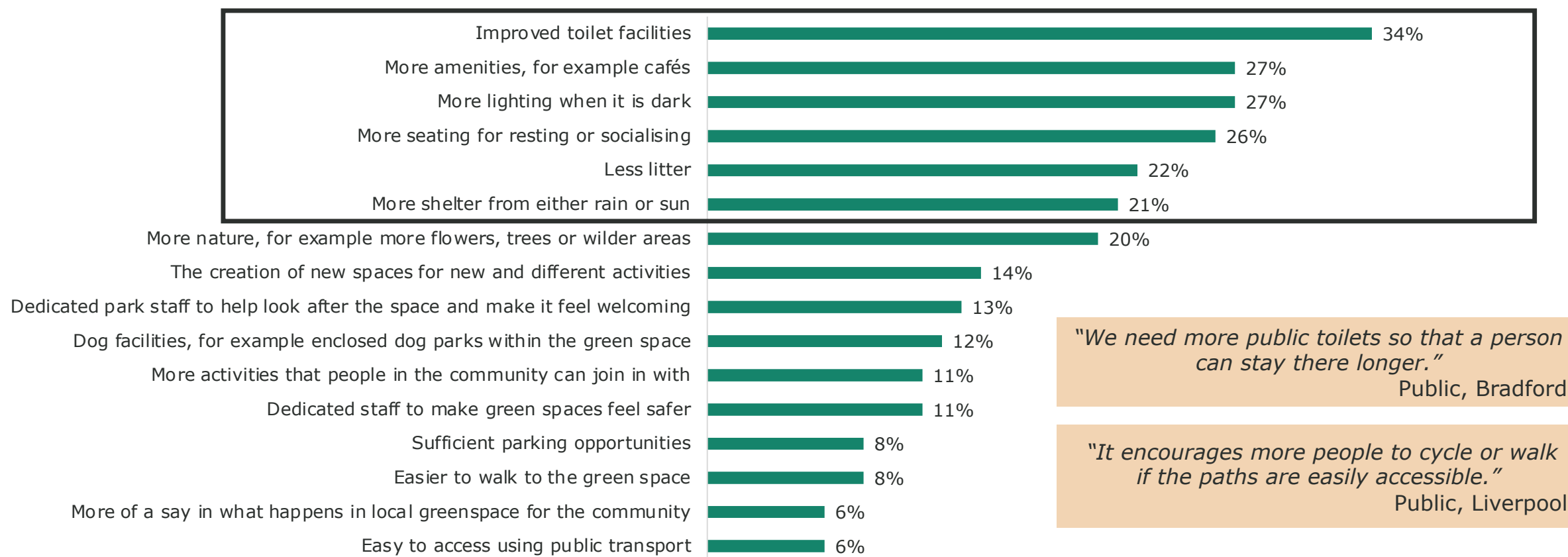
Public, Bradford

"When you look at the difference between East Park and West Park, it makes a massive difference when you put money into it. We've already got the parks there, we just need a bit of money in it."

Public, Hull

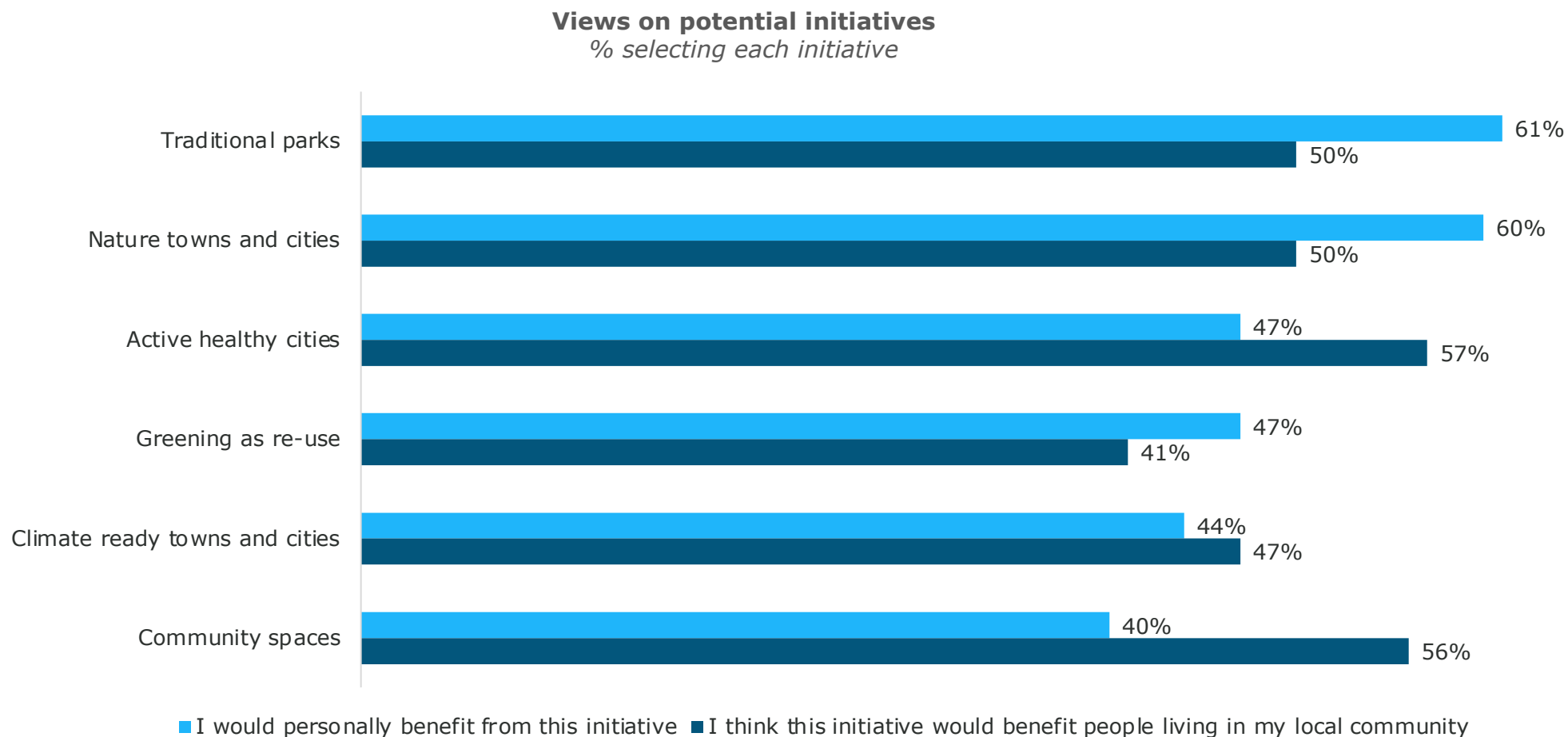
For the public, the focus falls on facilities and maintenance to make spaces welcoming/accessible

Factors to encourage usage of green spaces
 % ranking factor in their top three



Q. What do you think would encourage you to use or spend time in/around the green spaces within a 15-minute walk or wheelchair journey of where you live more often? Base: All who have a green space within 15 minutes of their home (n=992).

Improving and enhancing large traditional parks is the initiative that the public feel would deliver most personal benefit



Q. You're now going to see a list of initiatives that could be implemented in your town or city. Firstly, please select the three options that would most benefit you personally. Next, please select the three options that you think would benefit people living in your local community most. Base: All respondents (n=1009).

Parks are highly valued, and felt to be an efficient investment for limited funding

- The public sees parks as the **'default' type of urban green space**, and use the number or quality of parks as a proxy to describe how green their local area is.
 - Their importance stems from their multi-functionality; they can be used for a wide range of activities by a wide range of people.
- The public sees investing in traditional parks as an **efficient use of limited funds**:
 - Traditional parks are felt to cater to a broad range of people, so many will benefit from the investment.
 - Some feel their local destination parks have declined in recent years due to underfunding. They are keen to see investment so they can reach their full potential.
- However, there is **very low expectation that new traditional parks could be created**, as finding the land in urban areas is seen to be a challenge.

A photograph of a park path with trees and people walking. The path is paved and leads into the distance. There are large trees on either side, and a few people are walking away from the camera. The sky is overcast.

"The great thing about Liverpool is there's loads of parks – there seems to be lots of green areas."

Public, Liverpool

"In my childhood there was no mobile phones, we'd go down the park and take a picnic. For me, my kids have lost that if I don't fight for that now. So that's why I want a traditional park, so they have somewhere fun."

Public, Gateshead

Like the public, stakeholders recognise the need to get the basics right, identifying a series of 'must-haves'

Although advocates for larger scale innovation, stakeholders also recognise a series of 'must haves' for larger green spaces in the North:

More resting options

To make journeys to and stays in urban green spaces more enjoyable and more accessible for those who would like or need to take breaks

Cafés and/or kiosks

Making people more likely to go and stay longer

Public toilets

Maintained, free and accessible toilets for all

Information boards

Providing a map, overview of other local green spaces, facilities and activities

Easy access by public transport

With a focus on deprioritising cars, public transport is in need to create routes that make it easy to get to green spaces

Car parking

Though there is a push to deprioritise cars, sufficient parking opportunities (ideally free) are still seen to be needed

MOST FREQUENTLY MENTIONED

Opportunities to bring nature and 'wildness' into urban green spaces are prized by both public and stakeholders

Improving and maintaining current green spaces

Through additional facilities and amenities as well as general maintenance of footpaths, greenery and social areas.

Ensuring green spaces enable nature and wildlife to thrive

Through more designated 'wild' areas and initiatives to support growth.

Using green spaces to improve broader community, environmental and health outcomes

Through direct and indirect initiatives.

Stakeholders are strong advocates for initiatives that allow nature to thrive

Initiatives in this area that stakeholders would like to see include:

A shift from manicured greenery	Environmental stakeholders in particular advocate for a shift from expectations of perfectly manicured greenery to areas that are visibly wilder in nature.
Greenery in all areas	Stakeholders want to see greenery better distributed throughout towns and cities, not restricted to designated parks or nature reserves, to make urban environments greener and create more spaces for wildlife e.g. bees and small birds. Greenery on roofs and in streets are highlighted as key ways to achieve this.
Cleaning up rivers	Stakeholders would like to see steps taken to improve the health of rivers across the North, primarily for the benefit of surrounding nature and wildlife.

"Green spaces being put in not just for aesthetic purposes - thinking about green spaces not just as an area for making things look pretty. The things you need for species are not always pretty."

Stakeholder,
Environment

"For Durham, the river is important in terms of the impact upstream through urban environments from upland, then coast, is often missed. Green corridor and blue and green infrastructure are really important."

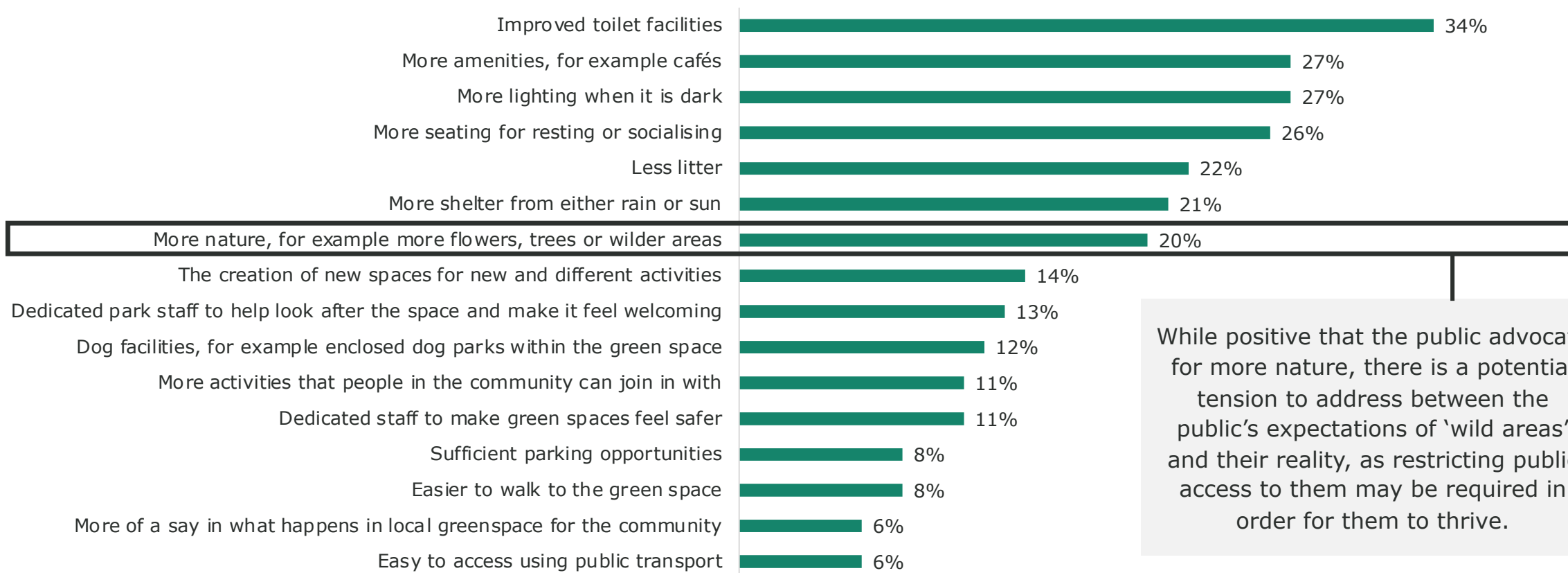
Stakeholder, Environment

"Smaller green spaces also like grass verges – places like that where no one goes, they're relatively undisturbed. It's looking at those places and improving the biodiversity."

Stakeholder, Environment

Beyond improved facilities, “More nature” is the change that the public feel would do most to encourage greater use of green spaces

Factors to encourage usage of green spaces
% ranking factor in their top three

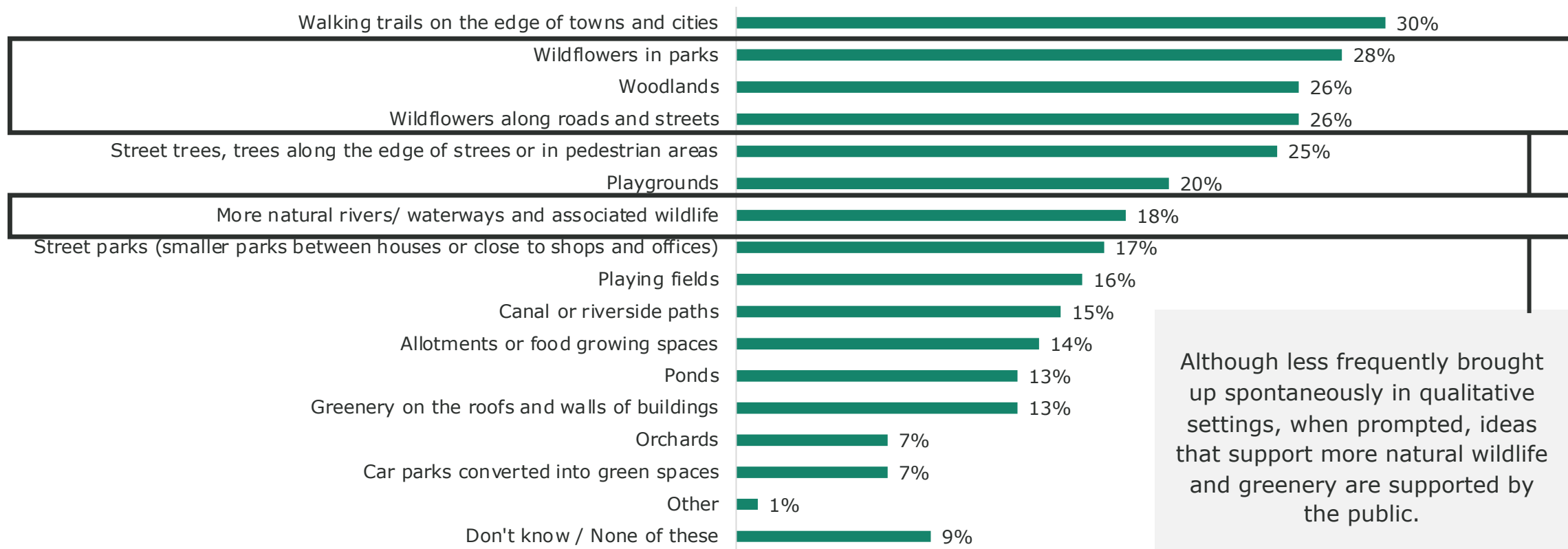


Q. What do you think would encourage you to use or spend time in/around the green spaces within a 15-minute walk or wheelchair journey of where you live more often? Base: All who have a green space within 15 minutes of their home (n=992).

Natural features - wildflowers, woodland, waterways and wildlife – are amongst the most desired improvements

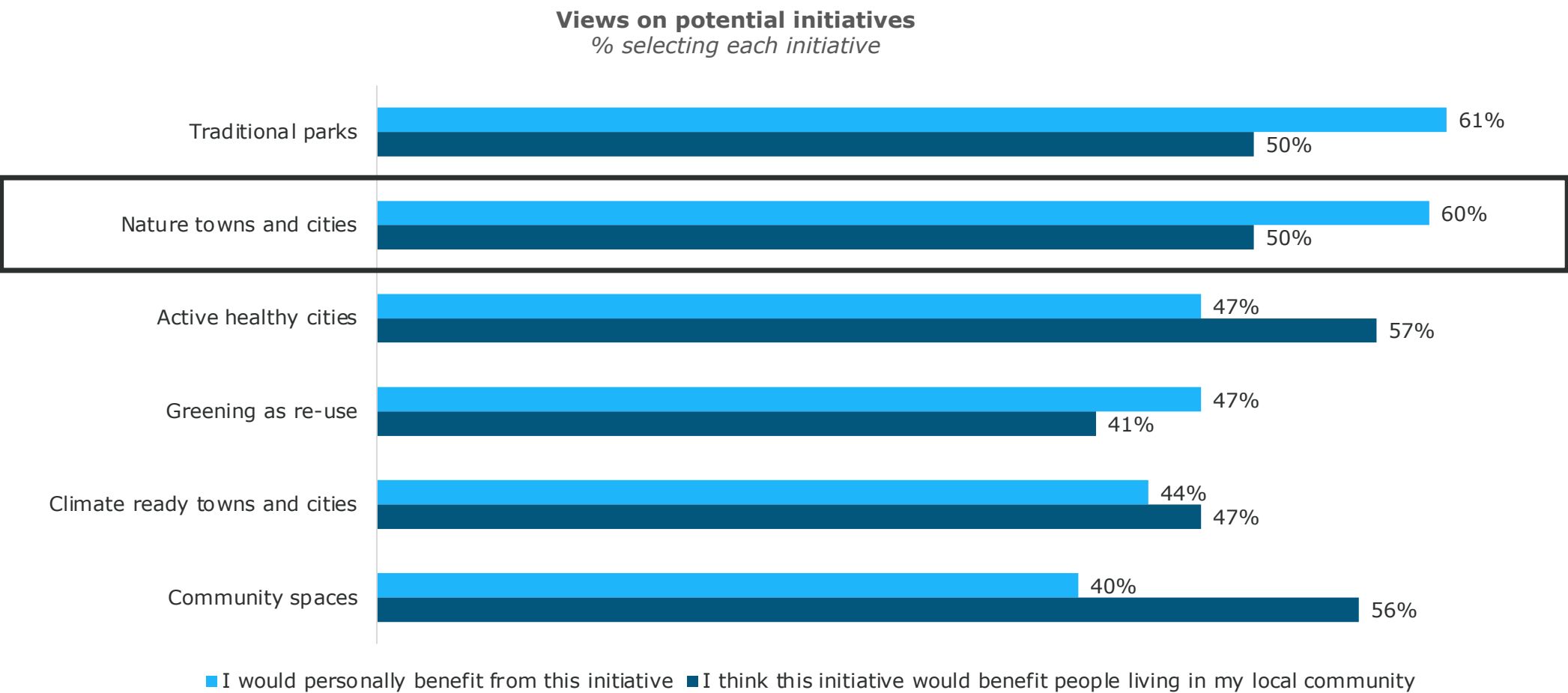
Most important things to be implemented in town/city

% ranking change in their top three



Although less frequently brought up spontaneously in qualitative settings, when prompted, ideas that support more natural wildlife and greenery are supported by the public.

Nature towns and cities is the second most desirable initiative we tested



Q. You're now going to see a list of initiatives that could be implemented in your town or city. Firstly, please select the three options that would most benefit you personally. Next, please select the three options that you think would benefit people living in your local community most. Base: All respondents (n=1009).

The public see benefits for both wildlife and people from bringing nature into urban areas

- The public **want to support nature** in their towns and cities, with initiatives that help wildlife having particularly broad appeal.
- They support the idea of moving away from manicured green spaces to more wildflowers.
- They can also see **wellbeing benefits for people** from increasing nature in urban areas, discussing the restorative power of woodlands and water.
- Wild spaces are also seen as key in encouraging young people to become **good custodians of nature**.
- The public feel bringing nature back into urban areas **could be achievable**:
 - It is felt to be relatively less disruptive than other potential changes.
 - Some feel developers of new housing estates should have some responsibility for this, lowering the burden on local authorities.



"My favourite place is Sunnyhurst Woods - I have a lot of feeling for the woods. They're open for everybody, and there are managed paths so it's accessible, but also unmanaged, secret paths."

Public, Darwen

"I would encourage the rewilding of some areas of each park in order to allow specific areas to be dedicated to wildlife and ensuring several species don't become extinct due to the rapid decline of appropriate spaces for these plants and animals. These rewilding spaces could also be used as an educational settings to encourage local schools to learn about parks and native plant and wildlife."

Public, Gateshead

Stakeholders are clear about the knock-on impacts that improved green spaces can have for individuals, communities and the environment.

Improving and maintaining current green spaces

Through additional facilities and amenities as well as general maintenance of footpaths, greenery and social areas.

Ensuring green spaces enable nature and wildlife to thrive

Through more designated 'wild' areas and initiatives to support growth.

Using green spaces to improve broader community, environmental and health outcomes

Through direct and indirect initiatives.

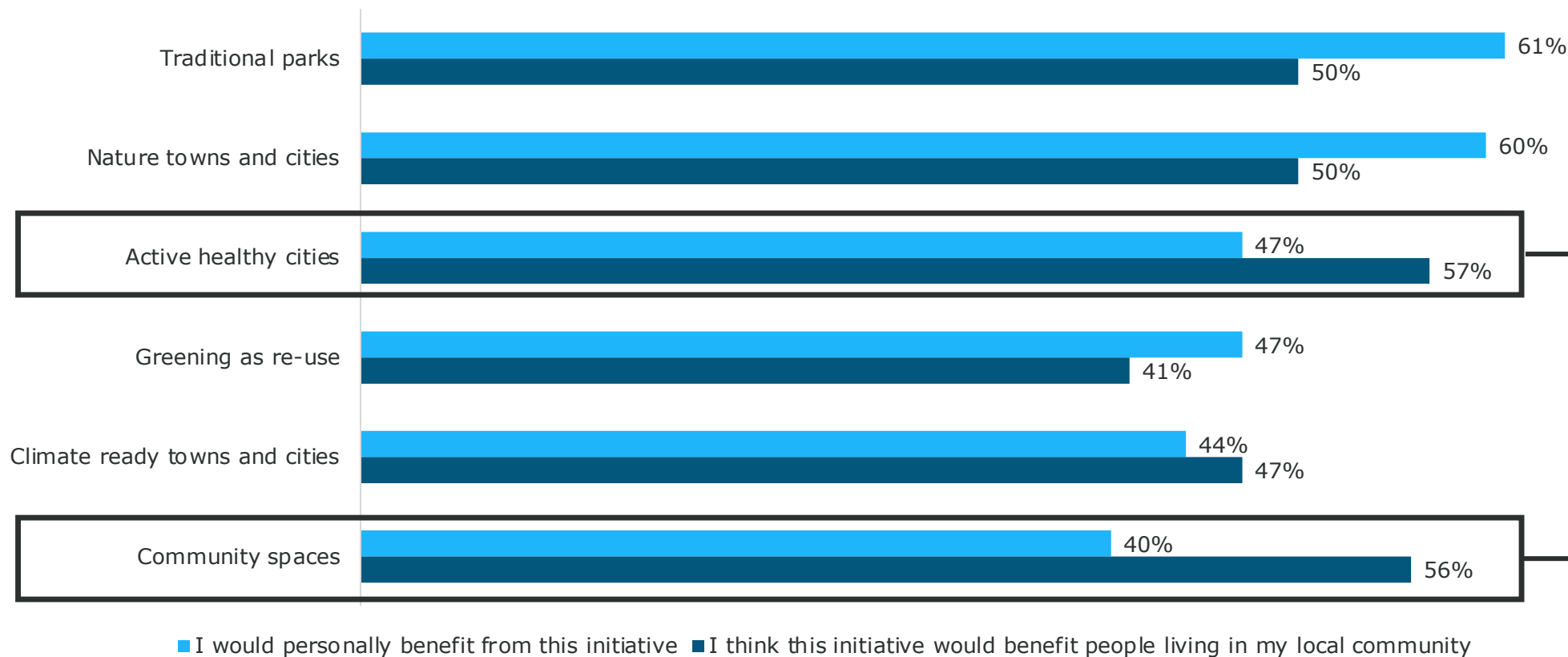
Stakeholders also want to see green space better deliver health, environmental and community benefits

Initiatives in this area that stakeholders would like to see include:

Green prescribing	While there are challenges to be overcome in terms of securing funding for such initiatives, stakeholders (including those with more of a health focus) do see the value of green prescription for those suffering physical and mental health issues.
Green corridors	Environmental experts want to see planners view green space as a whole, not by individual sites, so they can be linked to create corridors. This can create significant environmental and wildlife benefits, as well promoting active green travel among the public.
Zoning	This groups also points out that using a more joined-up approach to large, established sites, known as 'zoning', can allow bigger spaces to meet varied needs, e.g. community, commercial and climate.
Climate resilience	Stakeholders underline the increasing role that urban green space can play in counteracting the effects of climate change, especially in helping to reduce flood risk and cool down urban centres with tree cover.
Inclusive spaces	NGO stakeholders feel a new societal and public sector focus on inclusivity can help those under-served by spaces, such as ethnic minorities and teenage girls. Involving them in green space design and management can create more inclusive, universal sites.

While less personally motivating, the public also recognise the wider benefits to which green space can contribute

Views on potential initiatives
% selecting each initiative



The public values these initiatives for their local communities. However, they are deemed less personally beneficial than others.

Community spaces and opportunities to be active are thought to help communities thrive

- The public **want to see their communities thrive** and connect, and feel community spaces could help foster community cohesion.
 - They are thought to be particularly beneficial for people who are vulnerable, such as older or isolated people, or in more diverse areas.
- Similarly, the **potential community-wide health and wellbeing benefits from having more opportunities to be active** are clear for the public, even if they feel they wouldn't take part themselves.
- However, **some are concerned about the feasibility** of these ideas.
 - There are perceived challenges about securing ongoing funding and management of community spaces.
 - Some feel active travel schemes (especially for cycling) don't feel realistic given the existing infrastructure in their city, either because they wouldn't feel safe or because they worry these would impact their ability to drive.



"I would introduce street gym equipment that is free for all to use – at least those people who want to exercise outside would be able to introduce other types of exercise into their daily routine."

"I think these changes would benefit the wellbeing and health of the local community and also perhaps bring people together under everyday circumstances, not just when there is a major crisis."

Public, Hull

"I think there's more important things than low carbon, like health and exercise, and community. That's important for me."

Public, Bolton

Qualitatively, whilst these less direct benefits are intuitive for stakeholders, the public are less likely to see green space as a 'silver bullet' for wider social and environmental challenges

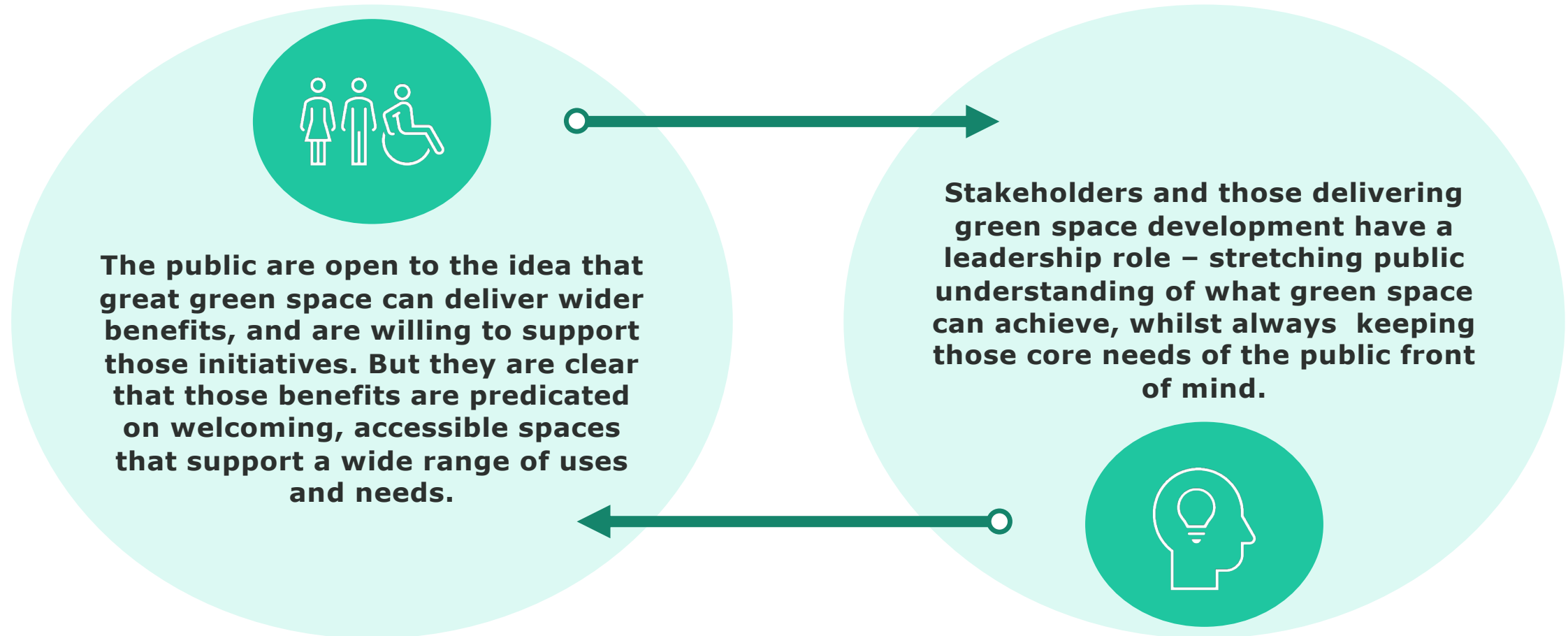
"We've become used to and expect [bad green spaces] – there are many poor spaces here but members of the public call it nice. This could be so much more - this needs to be key moving forward."

Stakeholder, Environment

"Some of the ideas are a bit random, like the flooding I'd never even considered."

Public, Gateshead

The public and stakeholders can learn from each other's perspectives



How green spaces should be developed



The public share stakeholder concerns regarding the funding of green spaces

The public would like to see the National government as a starting point for the funding of changes.

However, across all locations, there is skepticism about how realistic the idea is, given high awareness of funding challenges in other areas such as health and housing.

The public tend to reject funding coming from the NHS or visitors, but are more open to commercial events or community fundraising

When shown different potential funding routes, the public have the following responses:

Funding coming from the NHS

Is strongly rejected, as the public feel the NHS is already too stretched.

Funding coming from council tax, car parking or visitor charges

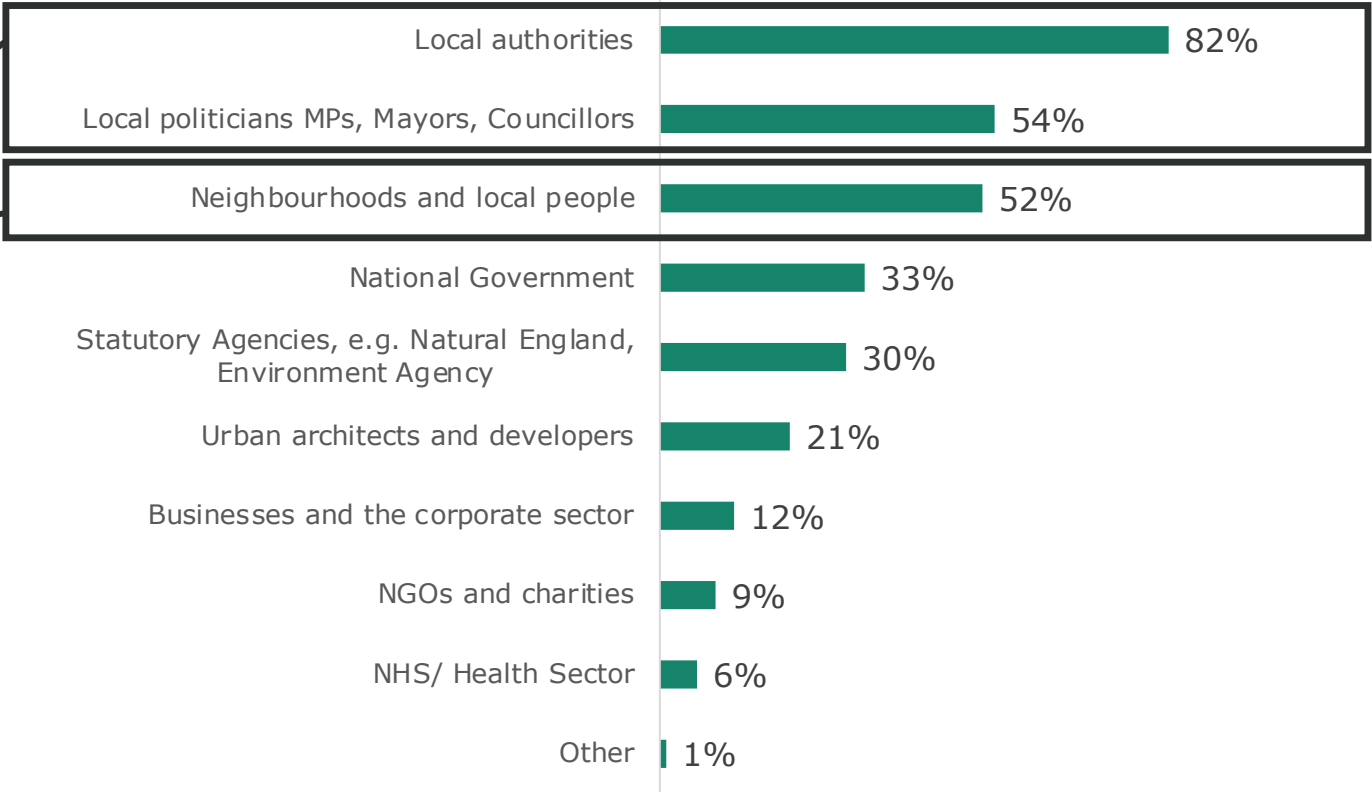
Is also rejected. Especially in the cost-living-crisis, the public do not want costs passed on to them.

Funding coming from commercial events or fundraising

Is more supported, as they are seen as a positive way for people to contribute to their local green spaces. However, some have concerns about the costs to host and cleanup such events.

The public and stakeholders alike see it first and foremost as local authorities' responsibility to create change – however they recognise that local communities may also be key

Who can deliver impact in improving green spaces
% who selected and ranked top three



Local authorities and politicians are felt by both the public and stakeholders to have the greatest potential to deliver impact. However, with skepticism about resourcing and funding, local people are seen to also be key.

"Local communities have to be supported by the local authority, making investments, maintenance."
Stakeholder, Environment

"The council do that, Shouldn't that be their job? Don't they get paid to do that?"
Public, Bradford

Local authorities are felt to be central in green space development, but face key challenges in resourcing

Local authorities

Lynch-pin in co-ordinating projects, driving initiatives and linking spaces

Stakeholders would like to see local authorities fund more spaces directly but are realistic about budgets and resources. However, they believe it is crucial local authorities have the central role in coordinating other groups involved, for example developers, NGOs, local communities etc., drawing on additional expertise from others, especially the third sector.

Working well

Position allows them to co-ordinate private, communities and voluntary sector

Can hold wider city/town view of green spaces and links different projects

Links to local communities allow them to support small local groups and participants

Working less well

A preference for short-term projects and 'wins'

Struggle to identify and work to shared vision

Tendency against embracing new ideas and ways of working

Local authorities support initiatives to improve access to funding, but which don't add additional responsibility

Support securing funding

Given their experience of funding challenges, local authorities support initiatives that could help successfully secure extra funding. This includes providing advice or guidance on innovative funding models, and building up an evidence base that can be used to demonstrate the value of green spaces.

Sharing knowledge

Schemes that provide opportunities for local authorities to collaborate internally or externally, such as through peer-learning, are well supported. However, stakeholders caution that these would need to be pitched correctly to be useful.

Responsibilities without support

Initiatives that place extra responsibilities onto local authorities (such as by making the provision of green space a statutory duty) without guaranteeing extra funding are not received positively. Stakeholders report that budgets are already too stretched to handle current statutory duties, so feel these options would not solve the problem.

Neighbourhood/community work is felt to be key to driving change at a local level

Neighbourhood

Key in developing and maintaining green spaces

Stakeholders would like to see communities engaged and mobilised to take a leading role, rather than just consulted or given too many responsibilities. This means projects are not only inspired and driven by local community input, but are actually created and maintained by them.

Working well

Key to providing buy in and engagement

Makes green spaces suitable to community needs

Cuts down antisocial behaviour, littering and mistreatment by other people in the community

Working less well

Projects can become reliant on local community maintenance and management

Tends to only work well in higher income areas, meaning green space disparity can be heightened

Tricky balance between community and environmental needs, especially when it comes to space access

Although local work with residents is seen to be needed, stakeholders also press the need for work to be 'joined up' across the region

Stakeholders are clear that they want to see a unified strategy on green space development to enable:

Evaluation and knowledge sharing, to ensure that stakeholders are able to effectively learn from one another.

Cross sector collaboration, to better harness all available skills and experience across sectors.

Making the economic case e.g. for health and crime outcomes, to be used to build the evidence base of the value of green spaces.

Joining up local action to form city-level plans, for example green corridors which would exist across different neighbourhoods.

National and regional policy pressure, for example to support access to better funding and resources for green space development.

"The problem with local authorities is they are supposed to look outwards to the local authorities beside them but that doesn't always happen. I am hopeful for the new North East Combined Authority, but they need a green regional strategy."

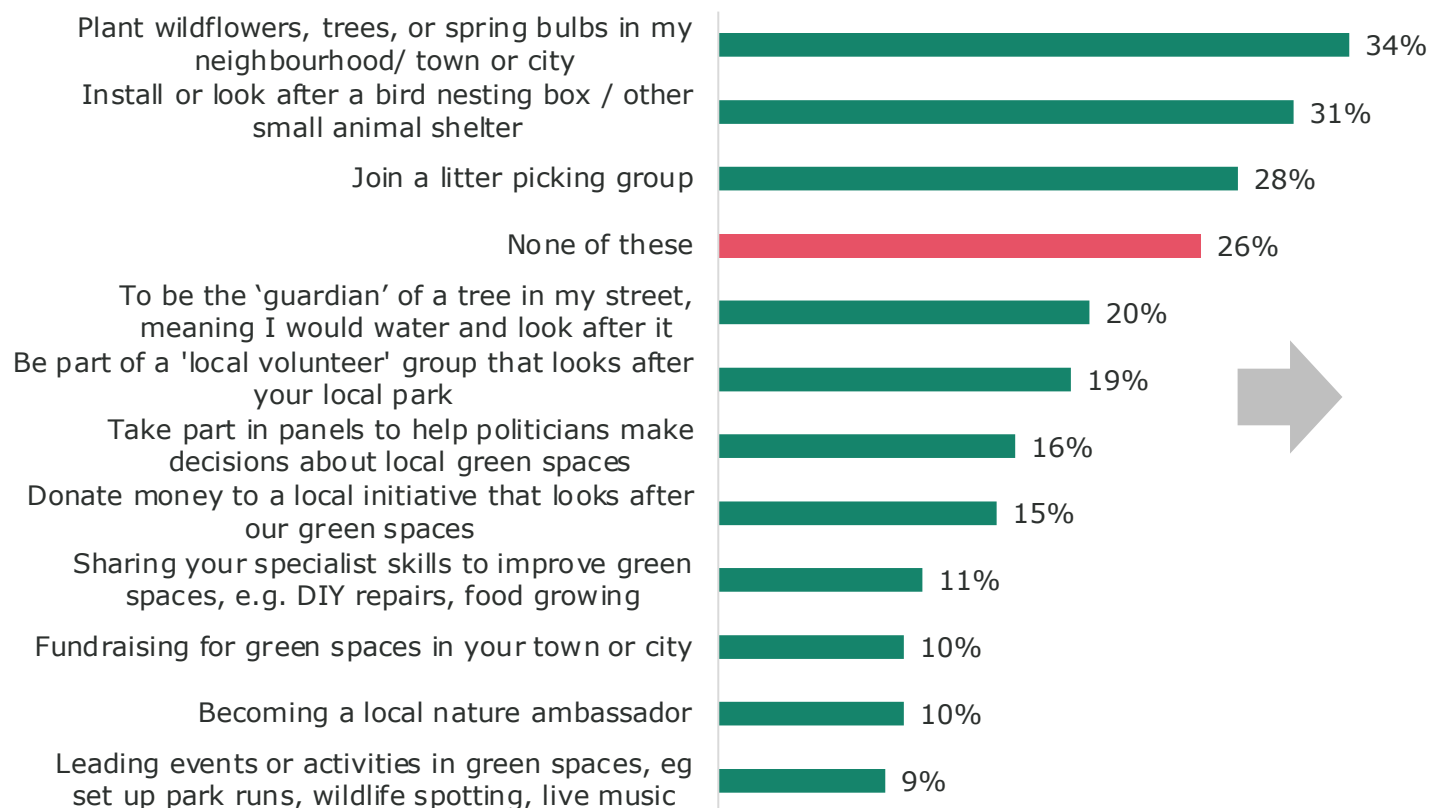
Stakeholder, Environment

"We are working a lot closer with our public health team. In my view, if we had an open door to bring in expertise, resource and commitments, it could join up with health and wellbeing to deliver projects in the corridor area and the wider urban fringe."

Stakeholder, Local Authority

Despite local people being seen to have a key role, there is mixed desire for personal participation – showing a need to identify ‘local champions’

Interest in initiatives in town/city
 % selecting each initiative



The public see neighbourhood engagement and community action as key in designing, developing and maintaining green spaces, however not all personally want to participate.

35% express interest for 1-2 initiatives. Interest is slightly higher among those aged 46-60 (40% vs 18-30 31% vs 31-45 33% vs 61+ 36%).

34% express interest in 3-5 initiatives. Here, interest is highest among those that often use green spaces (42% vs weekly 30% vs not often 19%), have a dog (40% vs no dog 32%) those with a higher SEG (AB 42% vs DE 27%) and those of ethnic minority background (48% vs 32% white).

This means it cannot be assumed that widespread public engagement will happen – identifying ‘local champions’ to drive change will be crucial.

NGOs and charities are also seen to have an important role in providing key expertise and outreach

NGOs and Charities

Hold the expertise and experience to implement successful programmes



Stakeholders believe NGOs and charities have expertise, access to funding and the ability to engage with local communities that local or central government do not. They feel the third sector should be given official, mandated and central roles in local government-funded and coordinated projects that will ensure their potential is fulfilled.

Working well

NGOs have expertise and experience that others don't, especially in running space and engaging communities

Third sector organisation can access source of funding not available to local authorities

NGOs are often a more trusted partner for communities than local or central government authorities

Working less well

Organisations lack funding

Prevalence of organisations inconsistent, for example they have a much bigger presence in major cities

Environmental goals can come into conflict with wider needs and wishes of local communities

The government, private sector, and local politicians are seen to have a secondary but still important role

Businesses and developers

Important role funding development and planning of new sites



Stakeholders claim that developers now provide significant funding for green projects, as they have quotas of green use to fill using the biodiversity metric. They want to see this harnessed by local authorities and NGOs alike to ensure these projects and funding are put to proper use and that new green sites reach their full potential.

National Government

Key to providing funding, mandates and circulating evidence base



National Government is felt to play an important role in providing central funding, mandating the use of nature for environmental, health and wellbeing benefits, and circulating evidence bases or best practice nationally to ensure success can be replicated at a national scale. However, as a localised approach is preferred by most, stakeholders place more emphasis on local government.

Local politicians

Can play symbolic role in awareness raising, PR and outreach



While some question the impact of local politicians and mayors (predominately due to a lack of perceived engagement with the topic), others argue that they can make a positive difference by creating publicity or even being the face of new and innovative projects. By doing this, they can raise awareness and spread good practice to other areas or local authorities.

6. What this means: Unlocking the power of green spaces

The full potential of green spaces across the North is being held back by a combination of factors

There is **little pressure for ambitious improvement** from the general public, the majority of whom are broadly satisfied with their local green spaces.

Those who report lower satisfaction and higher demand for improvement are often **facing other challenges** in their lives and neighbourhoods

In the absence of clear public demand for improvement, and with ever-tighter budgets, Local Government in the North tends to **focus resources elsewhere.**

Stakeholders are convinced of the potential, but feel **isolated and unclear on how to realise the benefits** of green space.

Green space tends to be seen as a 'pleasant' aspect of local life. There is little latent demand for significant improvement. Even those who are less satisfied, or who have lower access, tend to see other more pressing priorities in their lives and communities.

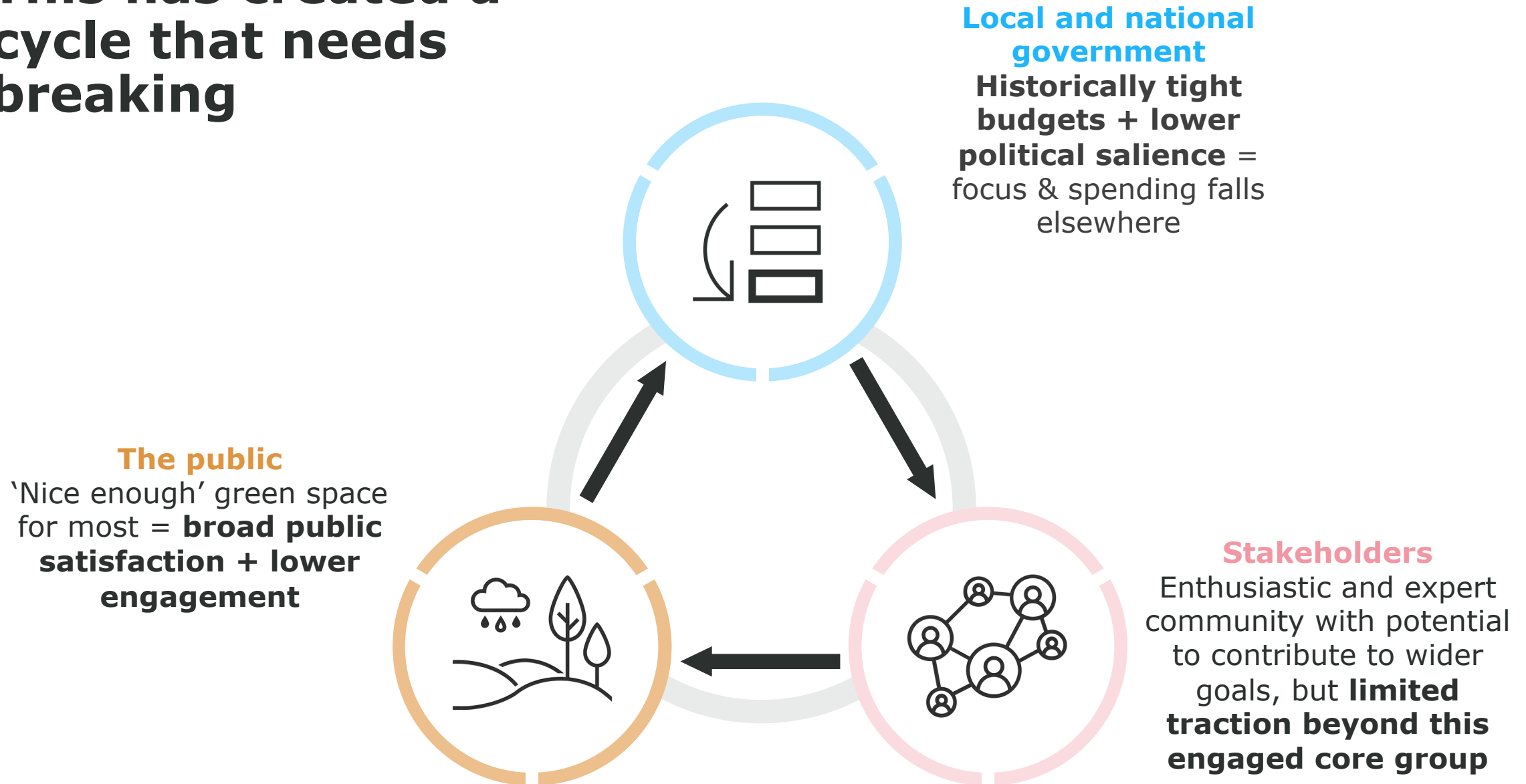
Facing other challenges such as antisocial behaviour and economic decline, these groups tend to prioritise tackling these issues over improving green spaces. Still these underserved groups see improving green spaces as something that should be made a priority for the benefit of the community.

Local Government stakeholders describe significant budgetary challenges, which means officials with a passion for green spaces find it hard to get traction outside their teams. This creates challenges in securing long term funding and resources, including staff.

Many feel frustrated at the isolated examples of success.

The biggest challenges to getting ideas off the ground include funding issues, an absence of a clear vision for the region and difficulties in bringing parties together to create momentum and effectively work together.

This has created a cycle that needs breaking



This research identifies a number of insights that could help unlock the power of green space for people, communities and nature in Northern Towns and cities:

There is widespread support for addressing inequalities in access to and quality of green space across towns and cities in the North.

There is untapped potential for cross sector working which stakeholders would like to see acted upon.

Stakeholders across local government, the wider sector and beyond see public engagement with green space as a key factor in delivering change.

Public passion, interest, ambition and engagement increases when people are given time and space to focus on green space near their homes.

To facilitate more ambitious change across the region, local engagement needs to be guided by a joined up, strategic plan for the North.

These insights point towards three interlinked roles for partners and leaders in the North:

Convening and coordinating to join up activity across towns and cities; share best practice; and drive policy change at regional and national levels

Targeting activity and resources to ensure the focus is on the areas in the North with the lowest access to green space, and the highest social need for it



Piloting and rolling out new models of very local engagement, co-creation and activation

1. Convening and coordinating to join up activity across towns and cities in the North

Although localised action is felt to be key, stakeholders in particular recognise the need for a unified vision, and a joining up of work to maximise impact. This could include:

Establishing and communicating the role that green space in the North can play in delivering a range of key social and political agendas for the region

Developing and marshalling the evidence in a single resource – collecting together case studies, evaluation work and examples of impact from across the region and beyond as e.g. 'Liveable Northern Towns and Cities – Nature North' and Resource Hub – Future Parks Accelerator'

Facilitating cross sector collaboration and knowledge sharing

Taking a lead in role in communicating the benefits of green space to communities and less-engaged stakeholders; and supporting a wider group of advocates to do the same. This could open up investment opportunities.

Identifying required policy changes to support urban green space development

Unified work should be done to identify potential policy changes that can support green space development

More detail on each of these areas can be found of the next slides

1. Convening and coordinating to join up activity across towns and cities in the North

Establishing and communicating the role that green space in the North can play in delivering a range of key social and political agendas for the region

This could include developing and marshalling the evidence base, taking a lead role in communicating this, and supporting a wider group of advocates to do the same could include the following for key agendas:

Supporting climate resilience	Supporting biodiversity	Supporting health	Supporting improvement of towns and cities	Supporting active travel
• Such as tapping into established work by local authorities on blue/green infrastructure, flood management and reducing the 'heat island effect' and considering future regulations via planning applications. • Work could be supported by the Environmental Agency as well as local players e.g., North East England Climate Coalition.	• Such as planting of trees and implementing more 'wild' spaces throughout towns and cities. • Work could be supported by academics, environmental specialists, local authorities and statutory agencies. • New funding routes such as the Biodiversity Net Gain scheme could be explored.	• Such as demonstrating the financial gain of green spaces to support preventative health e.g., through social prescribing and encouraging the repurposing of NHS land into green spaces. • Work could be supported by GP commissioning groups, public health representatives at local authorities and national agencies such as the Office for Health Improvement and Disparities.	• Such as tying green spaces into the Levelling Up agenda, promoting the role of green spaces in urban renewal, improving pride in place and opening up job growth. • Work could be supported by regional and local players like N11. • New funding routes such as Shared Prosperity funding from the Department of Levelling Up could be explored.	• Such as the creation of 'green corridors' throughout towns and cities, as well as more simple changes such as improved pathways. • Work could be supported by local authorities, transport representatives and urban planners. • New funding routes such as the potential for Active Travel funding could be explored.

1. Convening and coordinating to join up activity across towns and cities in the North

Facilitating cross sector collaboration and knowledge sharing

A coordinator that facilitates collaboration across different sectors and geographies is vital for better sharing of expertise

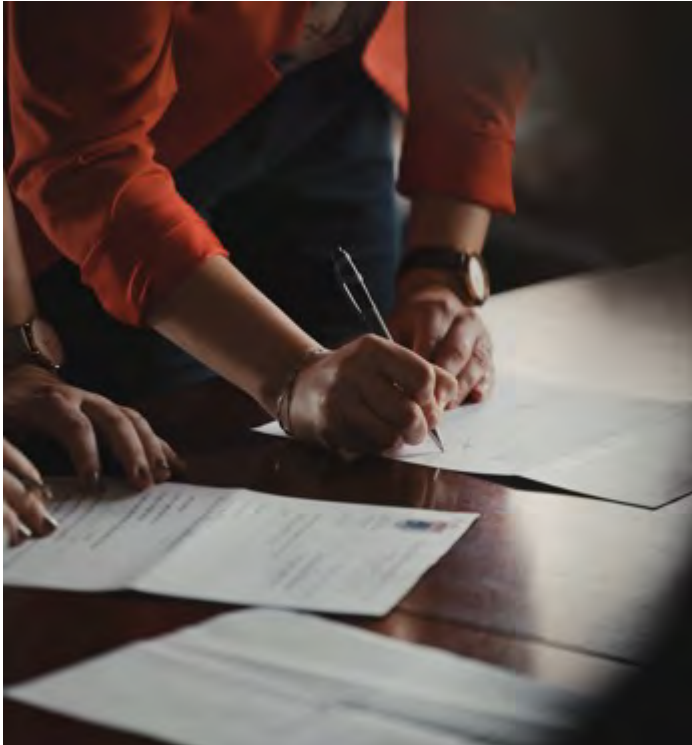
This role is key for

- Creating green spaces with multiple benefits
- Supporting joint funding
- Sharing learnings of regional work
- Building a 'resource library': evidence base of case studies including the proven impact of projects



1. Convening and coordinating to join up activity across towns and cities in the North

Identifying required policy changes to support urban green space development



- Policy change ideas like making the legal access to nature and provision of green spaces a statutory duty are popular with many stakeholders.
- However, local authorities reject policy change ideas that can result in additional responsibilities without additional support or funding.

Therefore, unified work between stakeholders, local authority and the public is key for developing policy change ideas that do not put undue pressure on one group

2. Targeting activity and resources to ensure the focus is on the areas with the lowest access and highest social need

Local engagement is key for demonstrating the topic's political salience and increasing public demand for improvement to urban green spaces.

Across all audiences, there is widespread support for initiating public engagement in the areas that need it most:

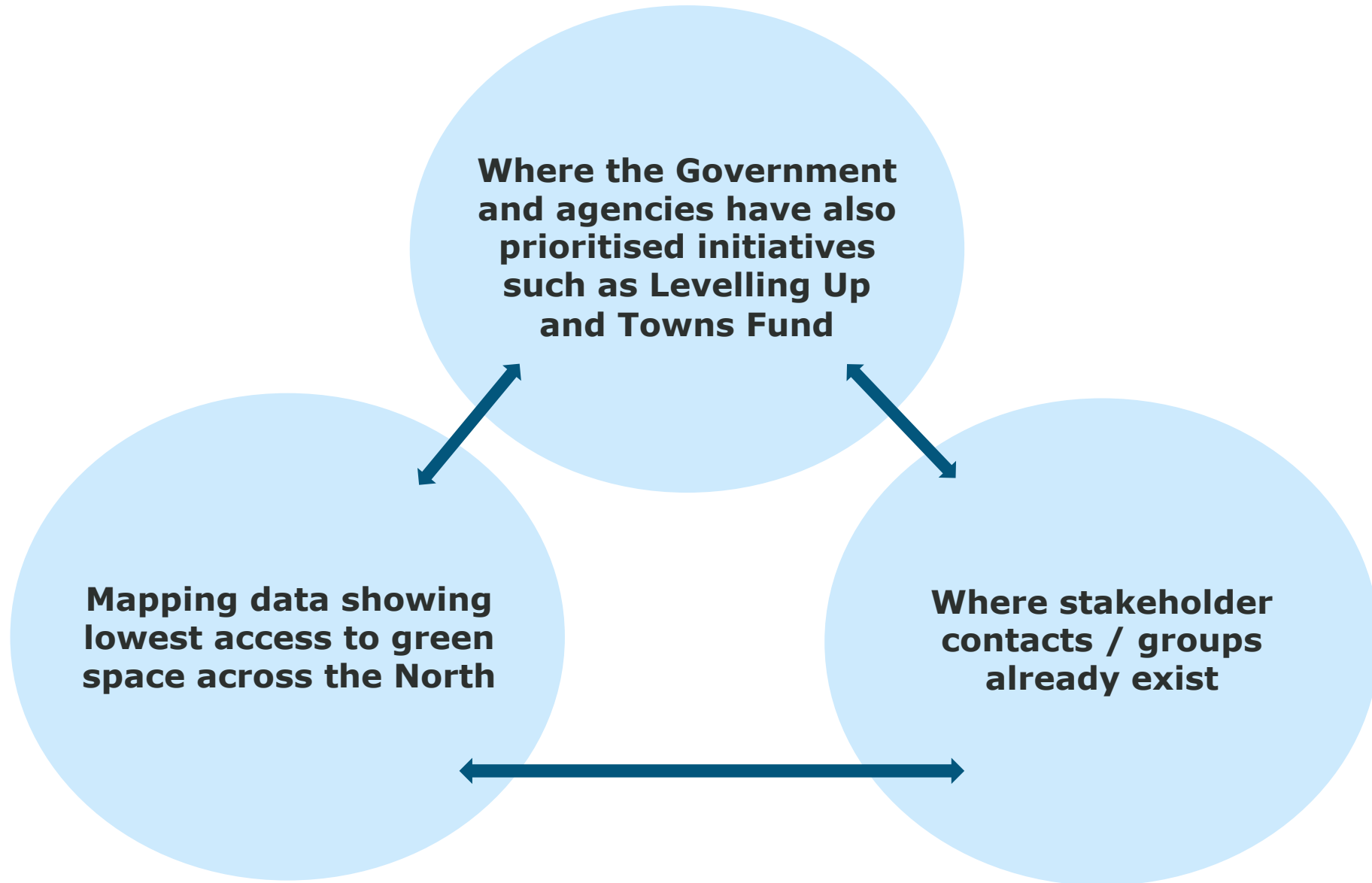
Public and stakeholders recognise inequality of access to green spaces across North

Poor or lacking green spaces felt to play key role in perceived deprivation of area

Members of public with lowest access to green spaces see improving them as higher priority

Several place-based initiatives in the North exist where green spaces could play stronger role (like Levelling Up Partnerships, Towns Fund)

2. Targeting activity and resources to ensure the focus is on the areas with the lowest access and highest social need



NB: Work should also be aligned with other similar initiatives e.g. Nature Neighbourhoods project in Manchester, Newcastle and Leeds

3. Piloting and rolling out new models of very local engagement, co-creation and activation

With key areas identified, partners should select 2-3 of the below to inform their local pilot case study:

Get people looking afresh at <u>their</u> green space	When residents take time to focus on the green space near their homes 'nice enough' satisfaction quickly gives way to both a heightened understanding of the role they play and gives ideas for improvement. This supports research which suggests people, especially children, feel disconnected from nature despite its value to wellbeing.
Ensure two-way inspiration between stakeholders and residents	Even when engaged, public thinking tends to be focused on 'the basics'. But exposure to stakeholder ideas and examples leads to creative and energised conversations. Seeing how residents adopt and adapt their vision for green spaces will both ground stakeholder thinking and could offer a source of renewed energy.
Build action teams of resident champions and expert stakeholders	Even where an engagement leads to an exciting local vision, only a few residents have the bandwidth and motivation to stay engaged. These individuals need to be supported with structures, tools and a plan to keep momentum and stay connected to the wider community.
Place residents at the front to engage wider stakeholders and secure funding	Clear evidence of resident engagement will be key for getting more generalist stakeholders involved – particularly local politicians and businesses, but also 'outer circle' stakeholders (such as public health).

Engage residents to build a neighbourhood vision for green spaces

Structured local organising with a core team

3. Piloting and rolling out new models of very local engagement, co-creation and activation

The public only supports new models and investments that improve what is already there first (even after being exposed to inspiring visions).

Therefore, new models need to

- Strike a balance between ambitions of stakeholders and priorities of local communities
- Combine key initiatives

Key initiatives

Improving and maintaining current green spaces

Through additional facilities and amenities as well as general maintenance of footpaths, greenery and social areas.

Ensuring green spaces enable nature and wildlife to thrive

Through more designated (but still accessible) 'wild' areas and initiatives to support growth. Water is particularly valuable for the public.

Using green spaces to improve broader community, environmental and health outcomes

Through direct and indirect initiatives – including 'building in' climate adaptation.

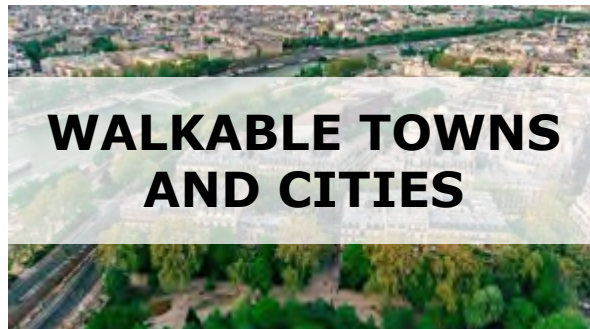
Following pilots, successes should be evaluated and learnings shared to further improve and refine the model accordingly to then facilitate further roll out. The expansion of case studies across the North can then be built into one growing evidence base, to make the case for further development.

7. Appendix

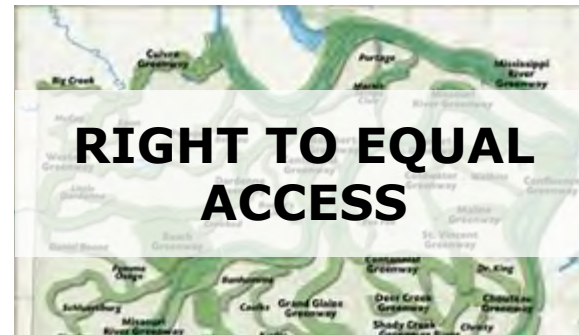


Stimulus tested with the public

In workshops, members of the public were shown 16 future possibilities for urban green spaces (1/2)



In workshops, members of the public were shown 16 future possibilities for urban green spaces (2/2)



6 of these were then selected by the National Trust to be tested quantitatively



Active, healthy cities

People are healthier because there are lots of opportunities in the city to be active.

Gardening and volunteering, places to walk or cycle in nature, growing fruit and vegetables.

- Gardening or walking groups prescribed by your doctor
- Nature filled footpaths and cycleways suitable for all
- Outdoor gyms and sports pitches



Example - Copenhagen Healthy City Status

- Attractive and easy to walk and cycle using off road green routes – 62% cycle to work every day
- Local healthy food served in schools and cafés
- Trees and green roofs reduce air pollution

ACTIVE, HEALTHY CITIES

The mental and physical health benefits of this idea drive strong support among those who like it. However, others feel there may be more effective ways to get these benefits.

- Some can see clear community-wide mental and physical benefits from initiatives to increase activity outside, with some who work in healthcare especially concerned about the health impacts of low levels of activity among the wider community.
- Those who see this as a lower priority tend not to believe these benefits to be unimportant. Instead, they may feel some schemes would not work with the existing infrastructure in their city, for example some in Hull feeling that cycling is too scary in Hull and therefore would not be a viable option.

57%

Of the public selected Active, Healthy Cities as one of their top 3 choices that would benefit their **local community**

47%

Of the public selected Active, Healthy Cities as one of their top 3 choices they would benefit from **personally**

"The ability to walk places and outdoor gyms are really important. As a nurse, I see a lot of people who need to improve their lifestyle, it would be really useful."

Public, Bolton

Low priority

High priority

Playful spaces



We can use green spaces to create lots of informal opportunities for children and adults to play.

Benefits include health and wellbeing, learning and development, social opportunities.

- Natural playscapes
- Outdoor fun and games
- Playgrounds



Example - Ormesby Hall natural play area

- Willow Stage, ropewalks, balance seesaw and stepping logs
- Places for children and adults to play and run wild

PLAYFUL SPACES

The public would like to see more playful spaces in their area to increase the wellbeing of children. However, there was lower engagement with the value of this to adults.

- The public value spaces for children to play, seeing this as important for children's wellbeing and development.
- However, there was lower engagement in the value of playful spaces for adults, beyond opportunities for parents to entertain children.
- Some feel children and young people are less engaged with outdoor play. While some therefore think playful spaces are now less important, others see this as a reason to support young people to use these spaces.

"Playful spaces can help kids develop, it's really important."

Public, Gateshead

"I think with the children, we should focus on them having fun and not stop their fun and playing, because now all they do is sit inside."

Public, Bradford

"We have play spaces in the parks but it's just a corner of them. I don't think we've got any that is just known for an adventure trail or anything like that."

Public, Darwen

Low priority

High priority



Resilient towns and cities

Towns and cities are better able to cope with extreme weather because of the well-designed green spaces that hold water to reduce flooding, as well as providing shade and cooling.

- Parks that hold flood water
- Street trees provide shade
- Green roofs cool buildings



Example - Sheffield Grey to Green

- Natural 'sinks' to capture and move rainwater, reducing street flooding
- Wild street pockets to help nature
- Pleasant streets for people to enjoy

RESILIENT TOWNS AND CITIES

Weather-related risks are perceived not to be a threat, which drives lower prioritisation of this idea. However, those who recall flooding in their local area see this as a higher priority.

- The idea of using green spaces to mitigate the risks from extreme weather feels less familiar, but does feel logical.
- Those who feel their area as at risk from flooding appreciated this idea as an important way to reduce the impact.
- However, those who do not perceive any risk to their local area from flooding see this as less relevant for their area.
- Risks from other types of weather, such as extreme heat, are not perceived as threats, so are seen as a lower priority.

"It's not really a problem – round here it doesn't really flood."

Public, Bolton

"The flooding thing I'd never really considered. If they could do something to stop the Tyne coming over that would be a high priority for me."

Public, Gateshead

Low priority



High priority

Nature towns and cities



A town or city that is buzzing with wildlife. Birdsong from the trees, wildflowers providing nectar for bees, clean rivers supporting otters and fish. Our nature is in decline, we can design towns and cities to reverse this and enable more people to enjoy time with nature.

- Wildflower strips along roads
- Clean rivers
- Nesting places for birds and beehives



Example – My Wild City, Bristol

- A city-wide plan to increase the amount of nature and wildlife led by the Wildlife Trust
- Gardens for pollinators, wilder parks, flower meadows
- Nature sites in the city which feature wildlife

NATURE TOWNS AND CITIES

The public feel supporting wildlife should be made a priority, and welcome the idea of bringing nature into cities.

- Initiatives that support local wildlife are appealing, with some citing additional benefits to people (for example, for pollination).
- This idea is perceived as less disruptive to implement than other ideas that bring environmental benefits, increasing support.
- Some suggest developers of new housing estates should have a responsibility for implementing similar initiatives.
- Joined up planning is seen to be crucial for avoiding accidental harm to schemes during maintenance (e.g. mowing wildflowers).
- However, some in Bradford feel this wouldn't be 'for' their city as they believe it wouldn't be appreciated. Others feel it would be more important for larger cities instead.

50%

Of the public selected Nature Towns and Cities as one of their top 3 choices that would benefit their **local community**

60%

Of the public selected Nature Towns and Cities as one of their top 3 choices they would benefit from **personally**

"It looks a lot better than grey dull streets. It will help insects and bees so they can collect more pollen."

Public, Gateshead

Low priority

High priority

Walkable towns and cities

How about getting across your town or city without having to walk or cycle alongside cars?

Green footpaths and cycleways connect houses with schools, businesses, shops, and services. This would improve health and might persuade people to ditch their cars for short journeys, thereby reducing congestion and pollution.

- Off road, green footpaths and cycleways
- Canals and riverside walks



Example - Paris 15-minute city

- Network of green paths and cycle routes connecting parts of city
- Aim for everyone to have green space within a 15-minute walk

WALKABLE TOWNS AND CITIES

The public are divided in their views on walkable towns and cities, feeling that feasibility varies a lot between different places.

- Some would like to see this happen, but there is scepticism about the feasibility of making all towns and cities walkable, particularly in Bolton.
- Some in other locations deprioritised this idea because they feel their town is already walkable, such as Gateshead.
- There are concerns that increasing walkability will decrease the public's freedom to use their cars, fuelled by stories circulating about low-emissions plans in other cities.
- Others are concerned about the potential disruption to car journeys caused by construction work or reduced road space.

"Although it sounds nice, but I feel it isn't practical for everyone to be able to walk or cycle, so we want to focus more on the idea of 15-minute cities where that includes using public transport."

Public, Bolton

"Walkable towns and cities – for us it's a low priority because we're already a walkable place. Maybe somewhere like London needs this."

Public, Gateshead

Low priority



High priority

Greening as re-use

All towns and cities have their derelict or unused spaces. We could green them and create new nature filled havens for people and wildlife.

This would benefit biodiversity and re-use historic assets that might have become eyesores such as disused trainlines, old industrial spaces and unused car parks.

- Walkways on disused railways
- Rewilding disused industrial sites



Example - New York High Line

- Disused elevated railway turned into attractive walking and cycle route
- Flowers, trees, stopping places and facilities
- Turned a derelict asset into a tourist attraction

GREENING AS RE-USE

Although examples where this has been done are appreciated as creative and resource-efficient, there is scepticism that this could be a viable option within their own towns or cities.

- Examples of similar work, such as the New York Highline, are seen as innovative and resource-efficient ways of creating green spaces from existing infrastructure.
- The public appreciate the potential to revitalise areas of their town that currently feel rundown.
- However, some question the feasibility of replicating this in their area, either due to a perceived lack of suitable sites, or concerns that the end result may still be an eyesore.

41%

Of the public selected Greening as Re-use as one of their top 3 choices that would benefit their **local community**

47%

Of the public selected Greening as Re-use as one of their top 3 choices they would benefit from **personally**

"That would be really cool but I don't know where we'd do that. But it's a really good idea."

Public, Bradford

Low priority

High priority

Community spaces

Green spaces and parks that help build communities. Rooms to meet, activities that encourage volunteering, opportunities for different groups to socialise.

This could help build local pride and a sense of belonging. It might break down barriers between different groups. Local groups would benefit from neighbourhood facilities.

- Community hubs
- Volunteering and events
- Social facilities



Bournemouth, Poole and Christchurch Parks Foundation

- Local charity fundraising for projects that communities want to see
- Park cafés are community hubs for people to meet and activities to be organized
- Projects include making new spaces in parks for nature using local volunteers

COMMUNITY SPACES

Community spaces is consistently supported as a way to support community cohesion, which is felt to have particular benefit for more vulnerable groups, such as older people.

- Community spaces are seen as vital for promoting community cohesion, especially in diverse areas such as Bradford.
- The public feel initiatives like this would most benefit people who are more vulnerable, such as older or isolated people.
- Some see a particularly important role for community spaces in the cost of living crisis, such as providing warm hubs.
- Some are concerned about the viability of funding and day-to-day management of community spaces due to past experiences, suggesting extra funding or functional support may be needed from the local council or private businesses.

56%

Of the public selected Community Spaces as one of their top 3 choices that would benefit their **local community**

40%

Of the public selected Community Spaces as one of their top 3 choices they would benefit from **personally**

"I think this is so important... It's a great hub for people to go to, a starting point for walks or whatever."

Public, Liverpool

Low priority

High priority

Grassroots management

More power for local people to shape and manage how their local green spaces look and feel.

Benefits might be a greater sense of local ownership and spaces that are more relevant to local needs.

- Local management groups
- Fundraising activities
- More powers for local people to do what they want with their parks



San Francisco Parks Alliance

- City-wide non-profit organisation dedicated to making parks safe and welcoming for all
- Raises funds from donors, business, and local people to make spaces better
- Runs events such as Sundown Cinema, concerts, promenades, park parties

GRASSROOTS MANAGEMENT

The public want communities to be able to make decisions about their local green spaces are run. However, there are concerns about how successful grassroots management would be in practice.

- Interest in this idea is driven by a desire for communities to have more say in decisions about their local area.
- Some feel communities are better able to decide what they need most, compared to local councils.
- However, some are concerned about how successful it would be, and whether communities would have sufficient ongoing support.
- In particular, some are concerned about people having enough time or the right skills to do this.
- Some would like to see the council retain some responsibility for the success of the green space(s), feeling it's their duty.

"Sometimes people on organising committees shouldn't be on organising committees because they're not very good at organising! So volunteers are great but they need some structure and someone to liaise with these groups."
Public, Darwen

"It gives the community more of a say in what happens – the community can put something together to try to get investment."
Public, Gateshead

Low priority

High priority



Children in nature

Green spaces are designed with children in mind and all schools have natural spaces and gardens. Every child has access to nature.

- School growing spaces
- Natural playscapes
- Forest school and outdoor learning
- Events and activities to help children learn about nature and be active in the outdoors



Example – National Trust 50 Things to Do before you are 11 ³/₄

- 50 easy activities that children can 'tick off' their list
- Examples are roll down a hill, build a den, create some wild art
- Enables children to enjoy nature

CHILDREN IN NATURE

The public – in particular parents – see improving spaces for children in nature as a top priority. As well as the immediate benefit to children's wellbeing, they feel this could increase the next generation's appreciation and understanding of nature.

- Increasing children's access to nature is seen as a top priority.
- As well as alleviating stress and allowing them to play, they feel time in nature is an important part of children's education.
- Some therefore see a key role for schools in providing this kind of space and incorporating it into the curriculum.
- They hope that having opportunities to play in nature could inspire children to treat nature well when they grow up.
- Those with no children still feel these spaces are valuable, recalling how much they valued time in nature as children.
- However, some feel the other ideas would provide similar benefits for children without the need for a specific initiative.

"I think it's so important. Kids aren't always blessed with having a garden, it's so hard. If that's incorporated into schools it's massive."

Public, Liverpool

"I like very much the education about the green spaces, about the woods. They have to start in primary school, they have to teach kids what is good for us, what is not good for us."

Public, Bolton

Low priority

High priority



Tranquil places



Everyone needs a place to escape, why not in a beautiful, quiet, green oasis? Calm spaces filled with birdsong rather than traffic noise.

Benefits would include improved mental health and more nature.

- Pockets of calm
- Quiet benches
- Meditative spaces



St Dunstan-in-the-East, London

- Quiet green space in a bombed out church
- Nature allowed to reclaim the space, self seeded flowers and climbers up the walls
- A pretty place in a backstreet right in the centre of the City of London

TRANQUIL PLACES

Tranquil places feel important for wellbeing. However, some consider this less of a priority as they feel there are already adequate spaces for their area, while others feel they may be impractical to create.

- Some appreciate the need for quiet spaces, which they see as being beneficial for reducing stress and protecting mental health.
- Some in Darwen and Liverpool feel that their area is already quiet, so they feel this is less of a priority.
- However, those who feel they have less access feel these spaces may be difficult to create in urban areas.
- Some are concerned about the safety of areas with less footfall.
- This type of green space is felt to be particularly at risk from development.

"This one's a highlight – pockets of calm, I love that."

Public, Bolton

"For me, we don't need anything new created, and I don't feel we're built up enough to need it."

Public, Darwen

Low priority

High priority



Traditional parks

Most Northern towns and cities have their historic parks that are filled with tradition and memories. Feed the ducks and boat on the lake; listen at the bandstand, maybe even a historic house or small animal farm.

Restoring these traditional parks would increase the sense of local pride and safeguard elements of local heritage.

- Restoring heritage assets such as bandstands
- Traditional planting and outdoor games
- Public facilities



Stanley Park, Blackpool

- Opened in 1920s
- Formal gardens, boating lake, clocktower and woodlands
- Children's play area, golf course and sports pitches
- Café and facilities

TRADITIONAL PARKS

Traditional destination parks are still highly valued as an accessible and enjoyable option for a day out. Where these are less prioritised, this tends to be because provision already feels sufficient.

- The public see traditional parks as an important and loved option for an inexpensive day out.
- This experience is particularly valued for children and families, with participants often citing fond memories of their own experiences in traditional parks as children.
- Some, especially those in Bolton, feel their town or city lacks a traditional park, and do not see a feasible route to creating one.
- Some in Bradford are concerned that the traditional parks they used to enjoy have declined due to lack of funding, and want to see these restored so that others can enjoy them too.

50%

Of the public selected Traditional Parks as one of their top 3 choices that would benefit their **local community**

61%

Of the public selected Traditional Parks as one of their top 3 choices they would benefit from **personally**

"[It's a] cheap family day out. Strengthens families."

Public, Bradford

Low priority

High priority

Edible towns and cities

Local food can be more healthy and environmentally friendly. People can bond whilst growing and eating, learning how to grow food can lead to a new hobby or career.

Food growing places can be linked to new businesses or community schemes for people in need.

- Allotments and community growing spaces
- Grow boxes and orchards with free fruit
- Urban farms
- Local food boxes and supplies for food banks



Example – Northern Roots, Oldham

- Plans for urban farm with crops, bees and poultry
- Community apprenticeships and food businesses
- Ideas for box schemes, pick your own and possibly links to local food banks

EDIBLE TOWNS AND CITIES

Initiatives around growing food spark the public's imagination and mostly feel achievable.

- Initiatives described within the edible cities idea feel more realistic and budget-friendly than other ideas.
- Some, especially older participants, compare these ideas to their experience growing or foraging for food as children, and feel that the community should be supported to return to these practices.
- Some report the positive social benefits of local allotments or other existing food growing schemes for their local community.
- Some see this as a useful way to help with the rising cost of food, though others are sceptical that this could be run at a sufficient scale to make a difference. Some also associate locally grown food with high costs.

"Everyone should know how to grow their own food. I think foraging food is coming back because of how expensive food is, though people are still suspicious of it."

Public, Darwen

"I can't see it. I like the idea but to do it at the scale to make a difference. The concept's good but maybe in a different location."

Public, Bolton

Low priority

High priority



Greening town and city centres



Changes to how we shop have left some high streets and town centres looking sad. We can use this as an opportunity for a radical rethink and turn high streets green.

Benefits include revitalising centres, removing eye sores, reasons for people to visit, social spaces that are free and make a change from cafés and shops.

- Pocket parks on the high street
- Replace tatty empty buildings with new green spaces
- Street trees, ponds, and meadows right in the heart of towns



Nottingham urban rewilding

- Broadmarsh shopping centre to be bulldozed for wetlands and a pocket park
- Peaches and pears in the park reflect historic street names
- Wilder corridors connecting the city centre to Sherwood Forest

GREENING TOWN AND CITY CENTRES

Greening town and city centres is felt to improve the experience of visiting these areas. However, it is seen as more of a 'nice to have'.

- The public feel greenery in built-up spaces is important for making spaces nice to walk through and appealing to be in.
- Some feel that greenery in shopping areas could be an easy way to make the experience nicer, especially if they offer somewhere to rest without needing to pay.
- This idea is particularly appealing as part of wider regeneration efforts that help businesses thrive.
- Some see this as less necessary as there are green spaces elsewhere that are able to provide more benefits.
- Those in Darwen feel their town centre is already green, so see this as a lower priority.

"Something in particular that breaks my heart around England, but especially around here: there's no place to sit down and just rest."

Public, Bolton

"With concrete space, it's important to have green – mentally, visually, it's a nice space to walk through."

Public, Bradford

"Having parks gives you a place to sit where you don't have to spend money – it's nice."

Public, Liverpool

Low priority

High priority



Right to equal access

A pledge to make access to green spaces equal for everyone in your town or city. Benefits of fresh air, places to play and experience nature available to all.

- Neighbourhood parks within walking distance of houses without gardens
- Public transport that takes you to open spaces
- A right to have a park or green space within 15 minutes (or 5 minutes) walk of every house



Example - St Louis, USA

- Long term local plan with commitment to 'equitable wellbeing'
- River Ring concept which joins up all green spaces across the city allowing all to access

RIGHT TO EQUAL ACCESS

The public see a right to equal access as very important, though some feel this is a lower priority because they feel their area already has good access.

- The public see this as an important right as a point of fairness, and some feel this should be accounted for during the development of new housing.
- When considering access, access for disabled people is the public's primary concern.
- The idea of equitable access dependent on where you live or access to a car is not top of mind, though is felt to be important.
- Some feel independent access for children to green spaces is limited by danger from vehicles.
- However some in Liverpool see this as a lower priority, as they feel equitable access is already sufficient in their area.

"It makes it easier for people to get to these places, especially if they've got families and no car."

Public, Bradford

"I personally feel this exists already, though whether it's nice is someone's opinion."

Public, Liverpool

Low priority

High priority



Making space for girls

Research indicates that many women and girls do not feel comfortable in parks and green spaces and that often there is little thought given to how they might want to use these spaces.

Better design in collaboration with local women and girls can make places safer, more attractive, and welcoming for women using them alone or in groups.

- Facilities and activities that appeal to women
- Safety built into design
- Women/girl friendly days or nights



Bredäng park in Stockholm

- Designed with local teenage girls
- Incorporates social spaces, speakers to play music, fun activities, lots of use making it safer
- Good lighting and open spaces, no dark corners

MAKING SPACE FOR GIRLS

Although women's safety is a big worry, there is concern that tackling the issue in this way may create further issues by increasing divisions. Some suggested focusing on making safer spaces for all.

- Safety in green spaces is a concern, especially for women.
- However, designing specific areas of parks specifically for women is felt to be counterproductive and increase vulnerability.
- Others are concerned this approach unfairly excludes boys and men, who may also have safety concerns. They would like to see this approach broadened to consider all genders.
- The idea that girls and women may have different design requirements lands less well, with some saying they feel preferences should not be assumed based on gender.
- Without thorough explanation, this idea can feel exclusionary.
- Responses to this idea were consistent across genders.

"Personally I don't see this as a priority because it's divisive - why would you say the space is just for girls?"

Public, Liverpool

"Making safe spaces should be for people in general - it could have a knock-on effect for everyone. But I do know lots of women who wouldn't ever do anything outside because of that safety thing."

Public, Darwen

Low priority



High priority

Low carbon towns and cities



World cities account for 70% of carbon emissions. Therefore, changing how towns and cities work could contribute to tackling climate change.

By changing green spaces to include more trees, support local food growing, and enable more people to walk or cycle, places in the North could help reduce the greenhouse gases that contribute to global warming.

- Many more trees and woodlands
- More community food growing
- More wetlands and meadows
- Green walking and cycle routes that reduce car use



Example – One Planet Cardiff

- Aims to become a carbon neutral city by 2030
- More green cycle ways to reduce car commuting
- Target to increase council land tree canopy by 25%
- Promote local food growing

CLIMATE-READY / LOW CARBON TOWNS AND CITIES

Although there is wide support for reducing pollution, especially through planting trees, initiatives to curb car use prompt concerns about fairness.

- Increasing tree coverage is a popular issue that is well-supported as a way of combatting climate change.
- The public want to see cleaner air and less pollution in city centres, both for environmental and health benefits.
- However, some are concerned that initiatives designed to encourage walking and cycling may reduce their freedom to drive their car. They feel these schemes may unfairly penalise working people, especially where they feel safe, cheap alternatives to car use are not yet in place.

47%

Of the public selected Climate Ready Towns and Cities as one of their top 3 choices that would benefit their **local community**

44%

Of the public selected Climate Ready Towns and Cities as one of their top 3 choices they would benefit from **personally**

"Trees are the most efficient carbon capture technology we've got, so trees are good, so if we want to reduce the risk of flooding put some trees there."

Public, Darwen

Low priority

High priority

Stimulus tested with stakeholders

We tested the following initiatives with local authorities



Advice and guidance on new business models

Tools to help you identify and develop innovative funding and finance models for urban green spaces, based on learning from other places.



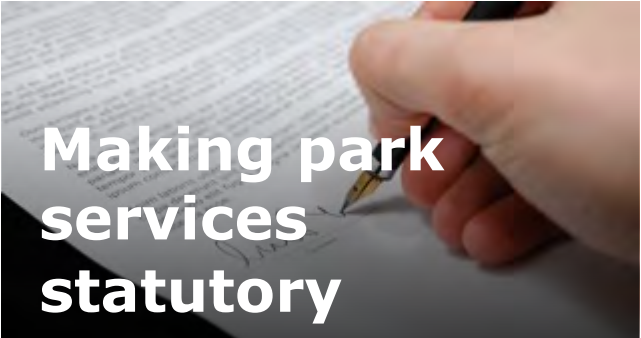
Health at the heart of parks

Support to put health at the heart of green space strategy by working with partners from Health and VCSE sectors and co-create health service delivery in green spaces, including but not limited to green social prescribing.



Accreditation or awards scheme

An Accreditation Scheme for urban green space. Local authorities would apply and be accredited based on ambition and progress towards best practice across the whole of the town or city's green space...In return you could gain publicity, additional funding, training and support.



Making park services statutory

Legislation making the provision of quality parks and greenspaces a statutory, rather than discretionary, duty for local authorities to fulfil.



Legal right to access nature

National legislation making the ability to access nature and green space a legal right for people in England.



Nature 4 Health fund

A funded programme on strategic and management skills, including an element aimed at elected representatives, that local authorities could bid to be a part of.

Local authorities like initiatives that enable peer learning, support health and give guidance on funding



Advice and guidance on new business models

Stakeholders at local authorities are actively seeking alternative ways to fund green spaces, and **strongly support** a scheme to provide more guidance. They say providing **examples of successful models** can give local authorities the confidence to try new ideas.



Health at the heart of parks

Stakeholders **strongly support this idea**, though say it should be **widened to include green space more broadly**. They feel green social prescribing has been a discussion for a long time, but an initiative like this could finally push local authorities to deliver it.



Nature 4 Health fund

Stakeholders **support this in principle** as a way of bridging health and green spaces. They feel this could be a route to providing a broader category of funding, as opposed to the 'piecemeal' funding they feel is the current standard. However, they caution that breaking out of existing primary care models will be a challenge, and **good evidential data will be needed** to support the programme.



Accreditation or awards

Stakeholders see this as a **valuable opportunity for peer learning** through examples of others' work. Stakeholders feel working towards an accreditation could also bring together different departments within a local authority, and contribute to a transparent way of working that is accountable to the public. However, they caution that the benefits of participating would need to clearly outweigh the costs.

Some other schemes raise practical concerns about implementation and funding, but could still feel helpful



Access to peer mentors and coaches

Stakeholders feel this could become a **useful resource for navigating issues**. However, some feel that the scheme would need to be **pitched at the right level** within the council. They want to ensure that those in more senior positions within the council receive this support, so that these priorities can be embedded into council strategy.



Leadership development

Stakeholders feel **this could be helpful but may be overambitious**. Some suggest broadening the scope of this beyond those in leadership positions to equip all with the right skills. Some note that elected leaders have competing responsibilities, so scheduling would need to recognise this. Some suggest instead delivering this through more tailored support for local authorities' internal training programmes.



Northern greenspace investor bank

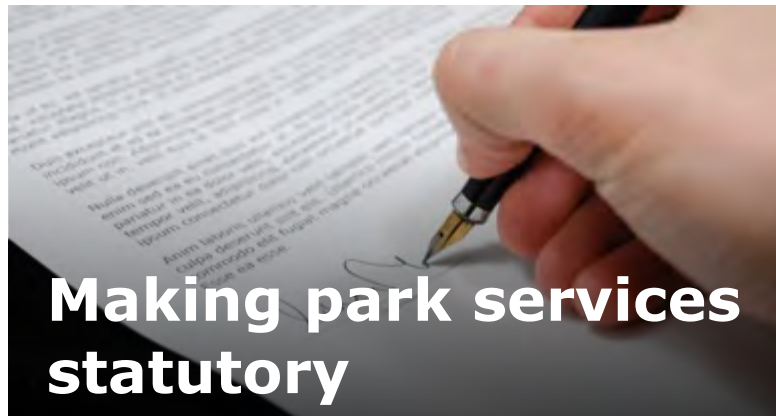
Stakeholders are **interested in any opportunities for funding**, especially if they could enable cross-boundary, regional working. However, they question **how this could work in practice**, and whether this would address key funding challenges: lack of continuity, and piecemeal allocation of funds for specific actions. Some suggest that providing guidance on how to maximise the financial input from developers may prove more useful.



Support to set up a parks and greenspaces foundation

Stakeholders feel **this could be positive**. However, they feel this would only be of use **if funding was provided** as part of the programme. Some also question whether the benefits would outweigh the resources needed to create an additional layer of bureaucracy like this.

Ideas that give local authorities more responsibility without guaranteeing more funding are less supported



Though this idea **may prove useful for providing extra impetus** to ensure provision, on balance stakeholders feel this could simply **increase the burden on already under-resourced local authorities**. Although this change would guarantee some funding for green spaces, it may reduce councils' ability to seek funding from other sources or partners, leaving them worse off financially.



Stakeholders are **unsure whether this would be an efficient way of tackling challenges** and are concerned that it could pull resources from elsewhere. However, if it could help with securing funding, it would feel more appealing.

List of stakeholders who participated in the research

In in-depth interviews

ARUP



MAKE
SPACE
FOR
GIRLS



NORTH
OF TYNE
~~~~~  
COMBINED  
AUTHORITY



urbansplash



# In workshops





# Thank you

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