

Green spaces

Summary: Annual Public Health Report 2021- Let's go outside, using nature to recover

Definition: 'Open, undeveloped land with natural vegetation'¹



Urbanisation

82% of the UK population live in urban environments². Various public health problems are associated with urbanisation: pollution, accidents, climate change, promotion of physical inactivity and mental health decline^{2,3}. The natural environment is a key wider determinant of health.

Benefits of green spaces

- Improved physical health
- Improved mental health
- Improved social cohesion within communities
- Improved well-being
- Reduced health inequalities within communities

Aim of this report: to showcase the many opportunities green spaces offer & promote healthier lifestyle- both for Harrow residents and for all health & wellbeing partners

How do green spaces provide these 5 benefits?

How green spaces improve the local environment:

- 1) Facilitate water drainage, absorb air pollutants and reduce heat retention by urban land surfaces; thereby **improving the quality of local environment** 11,9.
- 2) Green spaces' ability to capture pollutants helps to improve air quality thereby **reducing adverse effects on cardiovascular and respiratory health**
- 3) By sequestering carbon emissions, green spaces help to **tackle global warming**
- 4) **Increase biodiversity** by providing natural habitats for wildlife⁹.

Challenges to overcome to promote green spaces

Stress reduction: aesthetic experience of green spaces evokes positive emotions^{7,8}. Self-reported feelings of happiness and mental well-being are higher in those exercising in nature, while feelings of anxiety and stress are lower^{9,10}.

Economic benefits: due to all these health benefits, green spaces reduce cost of ill health and increase value and attraction of local neighbourhoods^{2,9}.

Social cohesion and interaction: green spaces are communal areas providing opportunities for social interaction. This improves public wellbeing by facilitating social networking and inclusion¹². A sense of community and belonging is fostered through this. Significant mental health benefits are gained, particularly for groups of people who would otherwise be isolated^{9,13}.

Attention restoration: green spaces improve cognitive function and reduce stress and fatigue. Encourages people outdoors which promotes healthy sleep and vitamin D exposure, thereby improving physical health and cognition¹¹.

Increased physical activity: physical inactivity is the 4th largest cause of disease and mortality in UK; increases risk of obesity, stroke, cardiovascular disease, type 2 diabetes and some cancers⁴. 48.6% of Harrow residents are less active than 30 minutes a day⁵. Green spaces provide spaces for exercise and living close to one makes you more likely to use it more frequently⁶.

Accessibility - improve ease of access, for children and elderly. **Ease of use**- well-maintained footpaths, maps and amenities. **Quality**- littered, unclean areas are a deterrent to use. **Safety**- people likely to use a green space if perceived to be safe. **Negative health effects**- allergen exposure can reduce use e.g. hay fever.

Health inequalities

- Low-income areas are associated with limited green space access² and worse life expectancy¹⁴.
- Income deprivation related health inequalities in mortality is lower in areas with more green space¹⁵.
- 'In Harrow, there is limited green space in the central and southern areas of the borough, which reflects the areas of greater deprivation'¹⁶.
- In order to address health inequalities, focus must be on increasing green space access in these areas

Green spaces in Harrow

Harrow is the tenth greenest London borough in terms of publicly accessible green space¹⁷. In 2015, 6.3% of Harrow residents had access to woodland, compared to 12.9% for London and 16.8% in England¹⁸.

Parks in Harrow

Parks in Harrow- special features

- 1) a) Headstone Manor Park- free museum & fair
- 2) b) Roxbourne Park- mini-railway & weekly live music
- 3) c) Pinner Memorial Park- museum & peace garden
- 4) d) Saddlers Mead Park- section of Grim's Dyke
- 5) e) Cedars Open Space- zipline & climbing area

Parks in Harrow- activities & amenities:

- 1) Health walks- free & guided
- 2) Children playgrounds- cleaned & monitored
- 3) Outdoor gyms- free to access
- 4) Sports pitches- football, cricket, rounders, hockey, rugby, tennis & basketball courts
- 5) Pump track- high quality tarmac bike track
- 6) Harrow skatepark
- 7) Park run- Canons & Recreation ground
- 8) Multi-use courts- for multiple sports
- 9) Other volunteer led activities offered e.g. tai chi, yoga, nordic walking, community days

Harrow has 28 large parks, 5 of which have been awarded Green Flag status (high quality). Most parks have local volunteer groups maintaining them. Wide array of activities at these parks, with most having good facilities e.g. changing rooms, toilets, car parks.

Other notable green spaces in Harrow

- 1) 10 nature reserves- managed by conservation forum, perfect for walking & exploring, well-mapped, run workshops regarding biodiversity & wildlife
- 2) 34 allotment sites- provide residents chance to grow their own sustainable fresh produce, can be rented from Harrow Council for annual fee
- 3) 2 shaw trust horticultural projects- encourage engagement in activities e.g. growing plants & litter picking
- 4) Ridgeway community garden- ongoing development to focus on therapeutic effects of physical & creative activity. Sessions covering horticulture, cooking, crafting & art. Residents can be referred through social prescribing service via GP surgeries
- 5) Playgrounds & amenity spaces- no designated specific use but opportunity for informal activity & improve aesthetics. Over 38 hectares of such space in Harrow

Recommendations

Recommendations for the Council

- 6) 1. To converse with our residents about how to use green space to improve happiness and health
- 7) 2. To ensure access to green space is factored into new developments
- 8) 3. To promote use of green space in tackling inequalities in Harrow
- 9) 4. To support maintenance & protection of existing green space in Harrow
- 10) 5. To promote accessibility to green space
- 11) 6. To help council staff promote green spaces

Recommendations for you our Residents

- 1) 1. To find out where your nearest green spaces area and how to get there
- 2) 2. To enjoy green space as a place to observe nature, connect with friends and unwind
- 3) 3. To use green spaces around your home more for leisure, exercise or growing
- 4) 4. To build green spaces into your weekly routine

Summary

The purpose of this report was to highlight the benefit of green space on the health and wellbeing of residents. The aim was to showcase the opportunities for residents to enjoy the variety of green space on offer in Harrow. Most people recognise that green spaces are an essential component of a healthy and happy community. The coronavirus pandemic has prompted residents to explore such spaces further, and we should continue to build on this motivation. By promoting and encouraging the use of all the wonderful green spaces Harrow has to offer, we can reduce the impact of ill-health on our population and we can build an even more vibrant borough together.

Acknowledgements for original report

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