

Access to Green Space

Why is this important to Bradford District?

Green space and outdoor space more generally, are important to people's health and wellbeing. The benefits of access to high quality green space include:

- Improved mental health and wellbeing for children, young people and adults
- Increased likelihood of physical activity across all age groups
- Reduced violence and aggression: a reduction in antisocial behaviour and incidence of crime in urban areas with green spaces
- Reduced health inequalities: significant reductions in mortality and morbidity from all causes and circulatory disease are associated with areas of greater green space. This result takes into account the effects of income deprivation
- Increased levels of community activity and residents' satisfaction
- Improvement in air and noise quality and sustainability (increasing biodiversity, encouraging active transport)
- Economic benefits

Source: Faculty of Public Health

Reviews of national and international evidence ([WHO, 2016](#); [Hunter and colleagues, 2017](#)) show that people, particularly children, who live close to a traditional urban park are likely to experience higher wellbeing benefits than people who live close to open space in urban areas that has little or no greenery. New studies published this year, including local evidence from the Born in Bradford birth cohort programme have added to this evidence base ([McEachan and colleagues, 2016](#); [Ferguson and colleagues, 2018](#))

The term green space is used broadly to refer both to formally designated publicly-accessible areas of green space such as parks and accessible woodland, to smaller green areas that are not formally adopted as green space, also to green infrastructure - on-street trees and greenery, green roofs and boundaries such as hedges which give a sense of a greener environment, 'blue' areas such as lakes, ponds, canals and fountains, and finally to the broader natural environment such as woodland and moorland, often designated as greenbelt.

Available data on use of outdoor space by residents of the district is limited but indicates that fewer people in the district make use of outdoor space for exercise or leisure reasons on average than in Yorkshire & Humber and across England. Woodland Trust data shows that fewer people live within easy walking distance of publicly-accessible woodland in the district than across England.

Local research has confirmed that Bradford District follows the national pattern of lower-income areas and areas with higher Black and Minority Ethnic populations having less accessible green space ([Ferguson and colleagues, 2018](#)).

Given the pattern of health inequalities in the district this is a concern. Green space appears to be less accessible in some of the areas where people could benefit the most from accessible green

space to spend more time outdoors and to increase levels of physical activity, both of which are supportive of wellbeing and of mental wellbeing in particular.

Accessible green space and outdoor space more generally is the subject of an annual report to Overview and Scrutiny. The latest report can be found [here](#).

Strategic context

[The 2018 National Planning Policy Framework](#) lists green infrastructure as one of the elements that local strategic policies for sustainable development should address. It defines it as:

“A network of multi-functional green space, urban and rural, which is capable of delivering a wide range of environmental and quality of life benefits for local communities.” (NPPF, 2018:67).

[The Bradford District Plan 2016-2020](#) highlights the district’s 36 parks as a key asset, and acknowledges that investing further in green infrastructure is important to achieving a zero carbon economy. Improving quality and access to green space would enable more people to be active in everyday life, helping to improve the health and wellbeing of the whole population. This will contribute to several of the Plan’s priority outcomes including ‘*Better health, Better lives, ‘A great start and good schools for all our children’, and ‘Safe, clean and active communities’*’.

Access to green space is a key success measure for the new Joint Health and Wellbeing Strategy 2018-2023, ‘[Connecting People and Place](#)’ under the outcome ‘*Bradford District is a healthy place to live, learn and work*’. Strong evidence that green space provides physical, mental wellbeing and social benefits will contribute to all four of the strategy’s outcomes as well as supporting the strategic priorities of other high-level plans and strategies that seek to: improve mental health and wellbeing; support families and promote children’s development and wellbeing; build a thriving economy; support people to be physically active, enable people to retain their independence and live at home for longer.

Accessibility can be interpreted in many different ways. For example, evidence based standards developed in Bristol local authority set out maximum recommend walking distances to a range of outdoor amenities:

- the nearest green space – 400m/nine minutes’ walk
- children’s play space – 450m/10 minutes’ walk
- formal green space – 600m/15 minutes’ walk
- informal green space – 550m/13 minutes’ walk
- natural green space – 700m/18 minutes’ walk

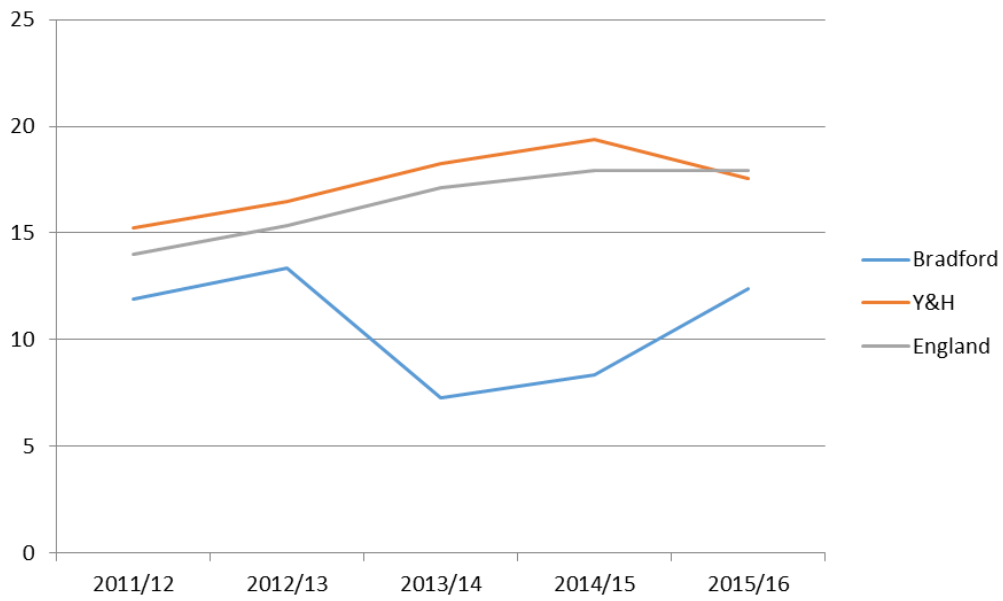
It is, however, not just distance that needs to be considered; perceptions of safety, the quality of the green/outdoor space, the location of major road routes and crossings, all influence how accessible a place is.

What do we know?

Latest available data (2015/16) shows that around 12.4% of the district’s population use outdoor space for exercise or health reasons; this is lower than England (18%) and Yorkshire and Humber (17.5%), however, the percentage is increasing.

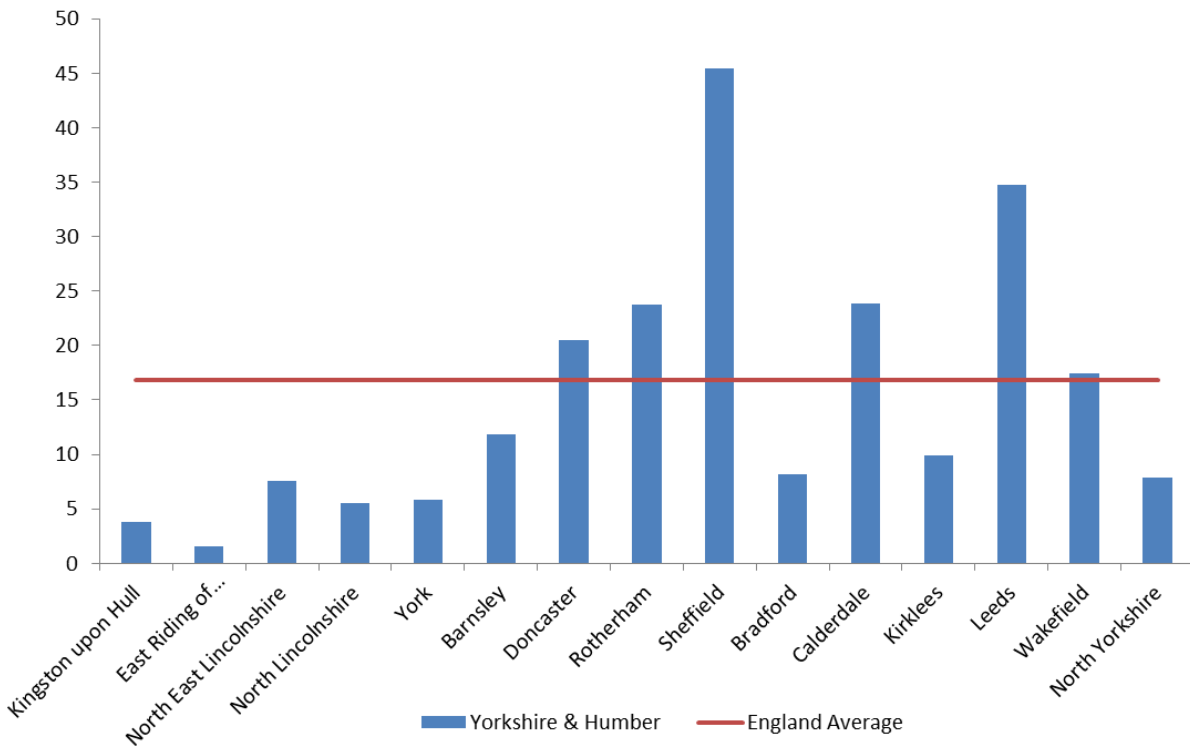
Careful interpretation of this data is needed. The data comes from the Annual Monitoring of Engagement with the Natural Environment (MENE) Survey and at a local level is based on a relatively small sample. Results also depend, in part, on how people interpret outdoor space, and what they mean by exercise.

Figure 1: Percentage of adults who use of outdoor space for exercise or health reasons



Source: PHE Fingertips

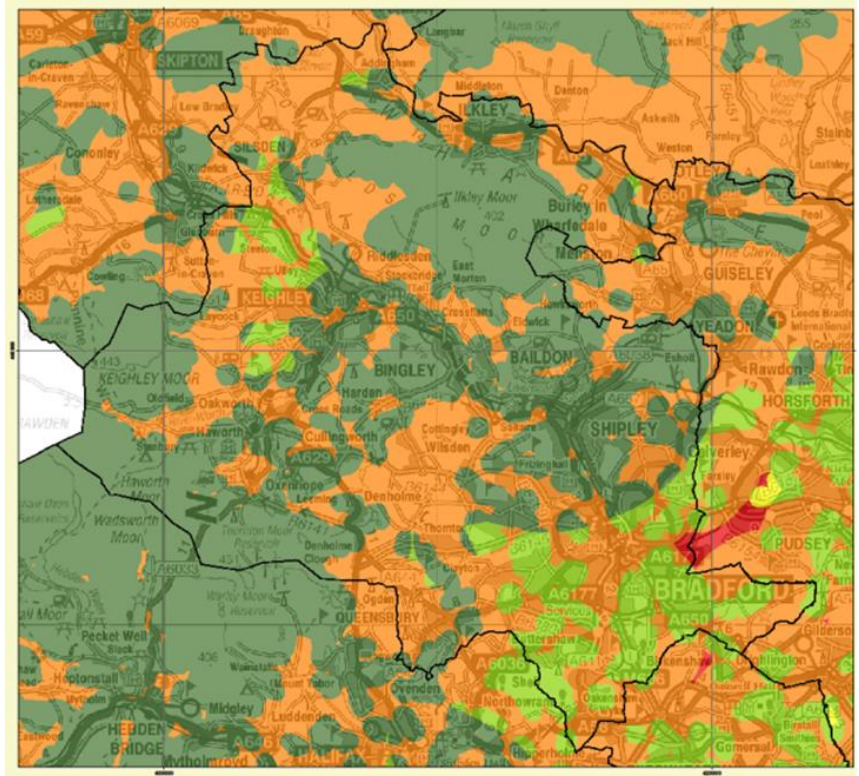
Figure 2: Percentage of people who have access to woodland 500 metres from where they live



Source: PHE Fingertips

Another measure produced by the Woodland Trust shows that only 8% of people in the district have publicly-accessible woodland within 500 metres of their home; this compares to 17% across England, and is at the lower end for the region.

Figure 3: Accessible Natural Green Space Standards (ANGSt) applied across Bradford District.

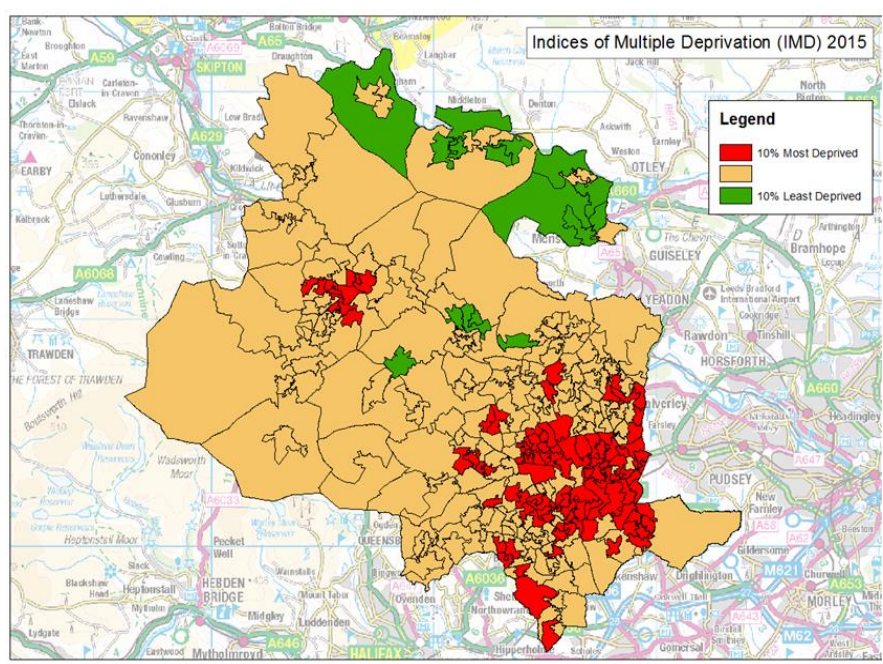


Source: Natural England

Figure 3 shows the accessibility of green spaces across Bradford District, with accessibility taken to mean distance. The green areas on the map show where a range of green spaces such as parks are easily accessible. This includes the northern and central areas of the district: Ilkley, Bingley, Baildon, Shipley, on the western boundary of the district and parts of south-east Bradford District. The district as a whole contains a lot of green space and some of the district's most urban areas are still relatively close to accessible green space, particularly in the form of urban parks.

The Yellow/orange/red areas show where there is no reasonably sized park within 300 metres. This includes large parts of Bradford City, and much of Keighley, Cuttingly, Wilsden, Denholme, and Queensbury, as well as parts of Thornton, Clayton, Silsden, Menston and the rest of south-east Bradford District.

Figure 4: Deprivation across Bradford District



Source: Understanding Bradford

Local research ([Ferguson and colleagues, 2018](#)) shows that Bradford District follows the national picture in terms of inequality in access to green space, with more deprived areas having relatively poorer access to green space.

The 2015 map of deprivation above, shows that the **least deprived areas** of the district generally **have good access** to a range of green spaces (coloured green on Figure 3 above).

[A national survey of how people engage with natural environments](#) showed that only 40% of urban residents visited the natural environment in the week before the survey. Younger people, people from Black and Minority Ethnic communities, people without access to a car and people with children were all more likely to visit urban green spaces, rather than natural places further afield. This adds weight to the evidence that living close to green space is important to people, and for many people it provides the main place that they spend leisure time outdoors.

Locally, unequal access is a cause for concern and will have greater impact in areas of low-income and where people live in high-density, terraced housing without private gardens, and where there are fewer opportunities for children to play safely outdoors. Accessible, affordable public transport is likely to be an important factor in enabling people who do not have a car to benefit from access to larger areas of green space and a wider range of natural environments.

On-going management and maintenance of land is important to keeping it useable over the long-term. The Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment ([CABE, 2010](#)) found that even where green space is plentiful in urban areas and on housing developments it can be under-used if people feel that it is unsafe, of poor quality or is poorly-maintained. Data from the MENE survey from more vulnerable groups of people and people in more deprived areas confirms this finding.

What Assets do we have?

The district has many natural assets - large areas of moorland, hills, woodland and rivers that surround the urban centres of the district, and a network of 36 parks including award winning urban parks. In some areas of high deprivation urban parks are helping to mitigate the impact of built-up, urban environments by providing green space.

In many areas local communities make extensive use of parks, sports grounds and other green spaces for community and leisure activities, both informally and formally through a wide network of sports and leisure clubs.

The council's Parks and Landscape service manages 590 hectares of woodland and over 1000 kilometres of rights of way through urban areas and open countryside that help people to walk, cycle and to access these areas. More than 20 'Friends of parks' groups are helping to maintain and improve green spaces.

Detailed local mapping work has begun: mapping techniques can identify green space and green assets down to the level of grass verges, and also pockets of unused open and brownfield space. The aim of local mapping can be twofold: to understand our current green assets, how they are distributed and where they are lacking; and to identify potential sites for new areas of green space, in case resources can be identified or brought into the district from external sources.

Gaps / challenges / opportunities

Publicly accessible, urban green infrastructure offers one of the best opportunities to address needs, and shows potential to help mitigate health inequalities on a large scale. Where green space is lacking (as in many highly urban areas of the district), multiple smaller, green spaces across a larger number of areas are likely to reach a larger number of people than a single large park (Ferguson and colleagues, 2018). We must think about all opportunities for improving green infrastructure, and not limit ourselves to the bigger park areas.

A 2017 evidence review for the World Health Organization found ***promising evidence*** of benefits from:

1. Park-based interventions that specifically combined a physical change to the green space and promotion/marketing programmes, particularly increased park use and physical activity;
2. Interventions that involved greening of vacant space having health and well-being benefits (reduction in stress) and social benefits (reduction in crime, increased perceptions of safety) benefits;
3. Greening of urban streets resulting in environmental benefits (increased biodiversity, reduced air pollution, reduction in illegal dumping);
4. Green infrastructure helping to manage storm water impacts in urban and suburban areas (Hunter and colleagues, 2017).

Parts of Bradford District are undergoing significant regeneration; this brings with it huge opportunities for improving access to green space.

Development of the first Housing Design Guide for Bradford District in 2018-19 brings the opportunity to outline our ambition to improve health and wellbeing through good-quality housing development, including access to green space on developments. The Master plan to re-develop the Top of Town as a healthy, happy, city village describes green space as an essential element of a healthy urban environment. There are also ambitious plans to introduce green and blue infrastructure as part of the canal Road Corridor development.

The current funding gap will require strong partnership working to identify and access new sources of funding. A review of the evidence for access to green space as a way to improve wellbeing has been used to support four funding bids by the council and partners during 2018.

Green spaces and natural environments need to be safe and *perceived* as safe, accessible and well-maintained in order that people will make regular use of them meaning that some green space in the district could be an under-used asset for wellbeing. Local community action will be the key to unlocking its potential.

Local public and private sector organisations may wish to review how they use indoor and outdoor space on their premises to create green or blue infrastructure or to enhance outdoor green spaces for staff and customers/clients.

Local businesses may wish to use their corporate social responsibility function to offer support (materials, staff time, matched funding) to community organisations to help them maintain, improve or renovate local areas, or to help them develop bids for external funding.

Risk factors

Risk factors include reduction of local authority and other public sector and third sector budgets. This is impacting on budgets to maintain and improve current green space and to create new areas of green space or add green infrastructure where it is lacking.

The district needs new housing and is working to a government target to provide 42,000 new dwellings by 2030. Statutory requirement to produce this many units in a short time will produce pressure on existing green space in areas of high demand, or on unused land that could in future have been renovated for open or green space for community use. Policy under the Core Strategy to allocate brownfield sites for housing and business development will help to reduce this pressure. However, poor air quality or the need to remediate ground pollution on re-purposed land can make brownfield sites more expensive or unsafe to develop.

What are we doing about it and what does the information presented mean for commissioners?

Commissioners across the public and voluntary sector may wish to:

- consider whether their organisations can implement any of the evidenced-based approaches presented here, and supported by an evidence review:
- identify how their commissions could add to the sum total of local green space and green infrastructure, particularly in areas where it is lacking by improving neglected, under-used public green space for community use; extending opening hours for existing green assets;
- explore how commissioning processes could link people who need wellbeing support to community green space groups who need new members; broker the process of making privately-owned green assets available to the public

References and additional information

2018 National Planning Policy Framework

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