

Parks and Open Spaces

Parks and Greenspaces as Public Health Assets

Event Briefing



Parks and greenspaces play an increasingly important role in supporting physical and mental wellbeing in our communities. This practice sharing event explored how these spaces are being used as public health assets and the partnerships and strategies which are helping to deliver impact in our communities.

Key Messages from LGBF

[LGBF data](#) highlights the significant financial pressures facing local government and the impact these pressures are having on council services. As a result, Culture and Leisure budgets have reduced by 26% in real terms since 2010/11. Parks and open spaces reflect this trend with spending having been reduced by 33%. The scale of reduction varies widely across local authority areas, with some councils having reduced their parks and open space budgets by over 75%, while others have increased budgets by 30%.

Figure 1 Change in Expenditure by Service Area since 2010/11

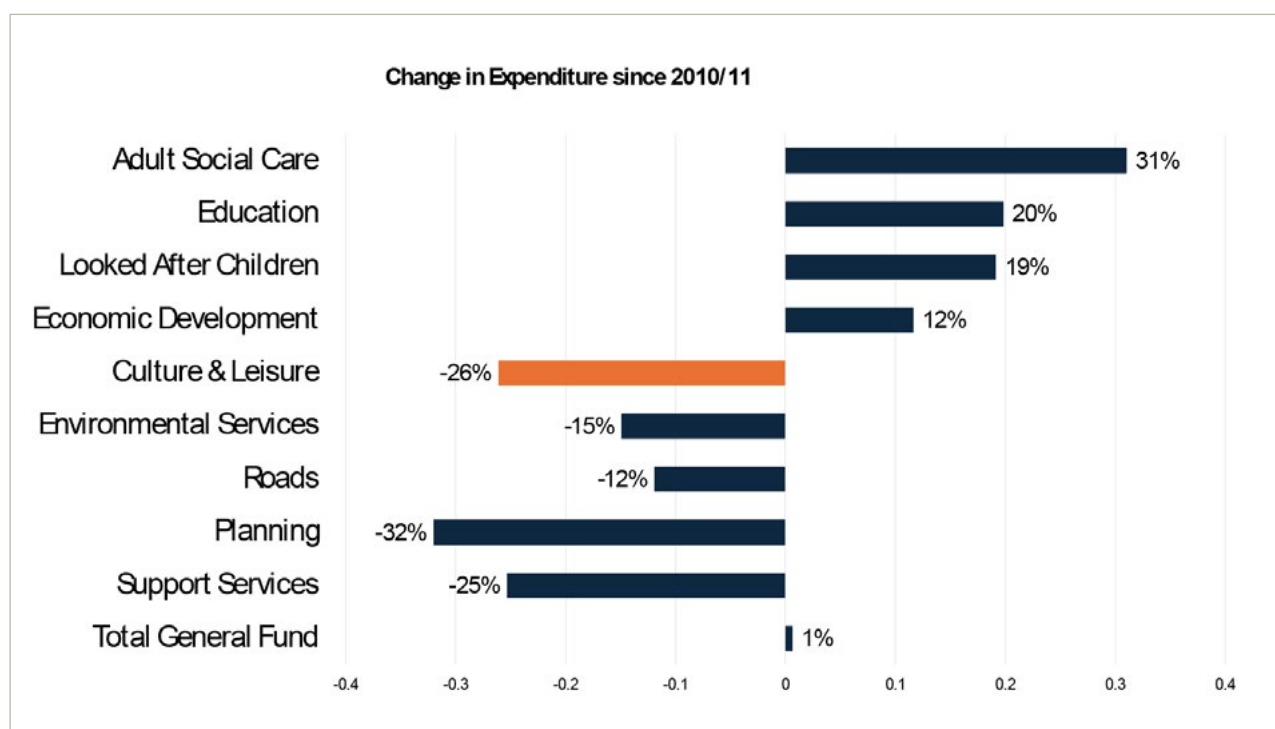
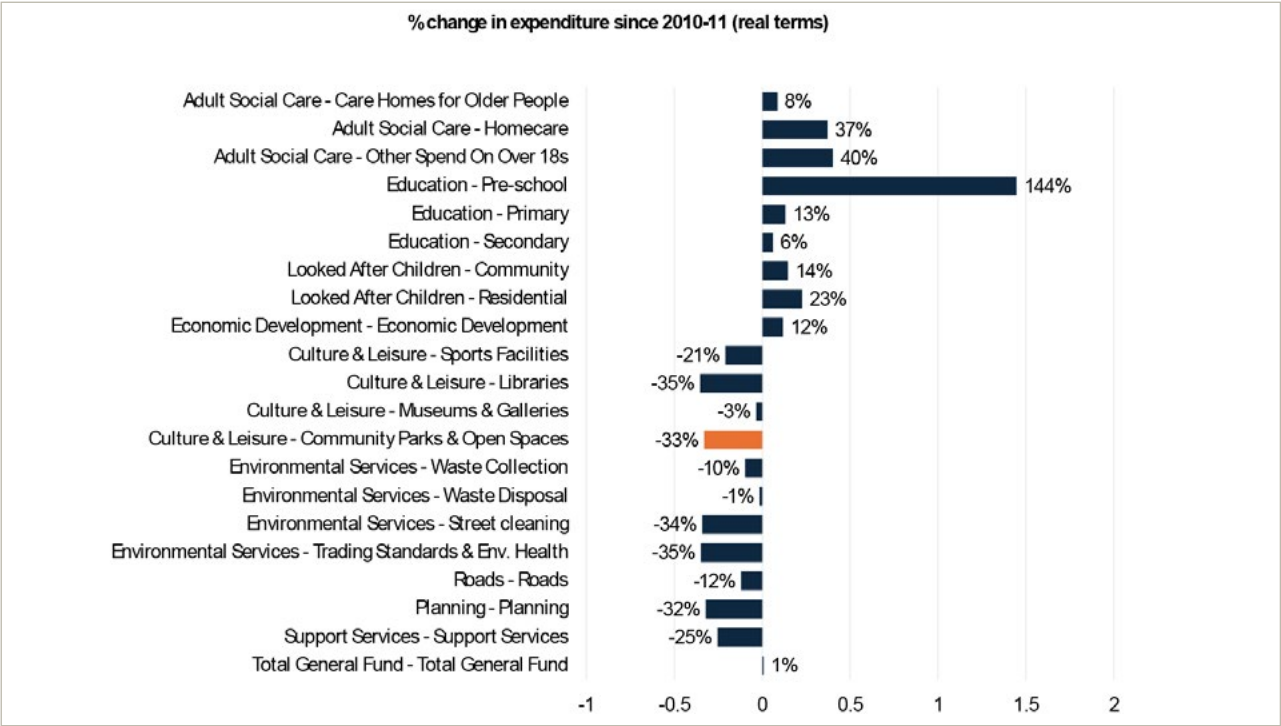
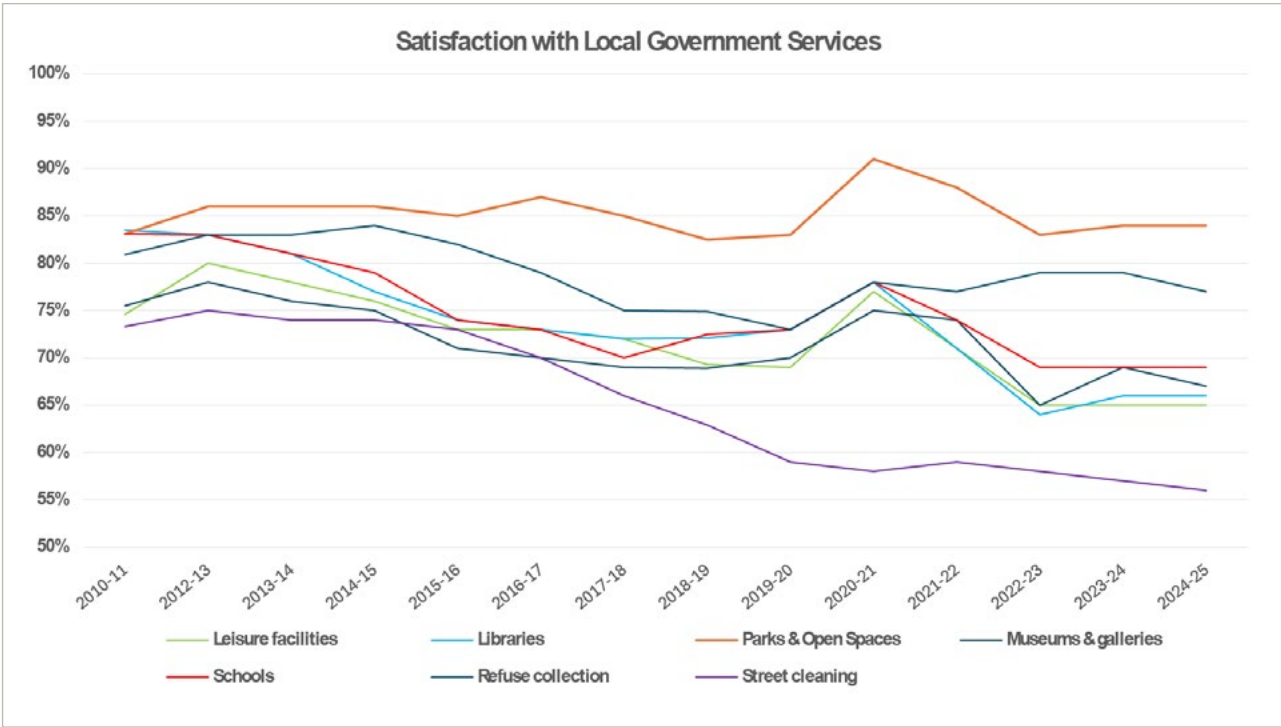


Figure 2 % change in expenditure since 2010-11 (real terms)



Despite this challenging financial context, community satisfaction rates have remained high and consistently above 80% over the longer term. This contrasts with the downward trend in satisfaction recorded across most other council services, indicating a notable degree of resilience in public perceptions of parks and open spaces and the benefits they provide to communities as valued public health assets. Further detail and analysis in relation to parks and greenspaces is available in the [LGBF National Overview report](#).

Figure 3 Satisfaction with Local Government Services



National Scene Setting: Exploring Recent and Future Developments in Policy and Innovation – Alison White, Chair of the Chief Officer Group – Health and Social Care Scotland

The Health Value of Green and Blue Spaces

- Significant evidence links access to nature with improved physical and mental health.
- Successive Chief Medical Officers have highlighted green and blue spaces as important for prevention and wellbeing.

Growing Public Demand

- Use has increased over time and remains high following the COVID-19 pandemic, with 68% of adults visiting outdoor spaces at least weekly.
- Public satisfaction remains high despite reduced investment, reflecting local services' efforts to absorb financial pressures while meeting demand.

Access and Inequality

- Proximity strongly influences use: 53% visit several times a week when a space is within a five-minute walk, compared with 16% when it is more than ten minutes away.
- Access and usage also vary by deprivation and minority ethnic background; paths and access routes offer practical opportunities for improvement.

Policy and Delivery

- Scotland's Environment Strategy gives strong recognition to the relationship between nature and health, while the Population Health Framework recognises access but does not place it among the most urgent priorities.
- Emerging initiatives include the Advancing Green Health Framework, Green Health Learning Network and planned National Social Prescribing Framework.

Key Challenges and Main Message

- Investment has not kept pace with demand, and around one quarter of the population visits green spaces less than once a month.
- Green health provision varies across Scotland, creating a postcode lottery.
- Policy recognition, delivery and investment are not yet fully aligned. Continued action is needed to realise the potential of Scotland's natural health service.

Sharing Local Practice

Parks and Greenspaces for Health and Wellbeing: Our Open Space Strategy – East Lothian Council

East Lothian Council's Open Space Strategy provides a ten-year framework for protecting, enhancing and managing parks and greenspaces across East Lothian. Underpinned by an audit of publicly accessible open spaces and community engagement, the strategy brings together priorities relating to health and wellbeing, climate and nature. It recognises the contribution of parks and greenspaces to physical activity, social connection, play, access to nature and climate resilience.

The Council is using the evidence gathered to identify local priorities and guide improvements to accessibility, paths, seating, play and recreation, community growing and biodiversity. Delivery is supported by collaboration across Council services and with communities and other partners. The approach also places emphasis on inclusive design and on understanding the barriers that can affect how different groups experience and use these spaces. By combining evidence, operational knowledge and community insight, The Council has established a practical foundation for developing greener, healthier and more inclusive places.

[Read the full case study.](#)



Bringing Nature into our Parks and Greenspaces – Aberdeen City Council

Aberdeen City Council has developed a connected programme of pollinator-friendly habitats across parks, greenspaces, river corridors and coastal locations. Through Parks for Pollinators, Aberdeen B-Lines and Aberdeen Nectar Networks, the Council and its partners created, restored or improved approximately 22 hectares of habitat. Activity included establishing wildflower meadows, enhancing wetlands, planting native species, adapting grassland management and creating nesting features for pollinators.

The work was tailored to local site conditions and designed to strengthen connections between habitats across the city. Community groups, schools and volunteers contributed through planting, habitat creation, wildlife events and educational activities, helping to build local knowledge and connection with nature. Management plans and longer-term agreements provide a basis for sustaining the improvements. The Council's approach demonstrates how practical habitat measures, community participation and partnership working can support urban nature recovery while enhancing people's experience of local greenspaces.

[Read the full case study.](#)



Nearer to Nature – North Lanarkshire Council

North Lanarkshire Council's Nearer to Nature project has established an evidence-based approach to supporting fairer, more resilient and better-connected greenspaces. As part of the project, the Council has developed an environmental justice mapping tool that combines social and environmental evidence to identify inequalities in access to greenspace, exposure to environmental risks and opportunities to strengthen local nature networks.

The mapping process has informed the selection of 18 priority greenspaces across nine community board areas, taking account of deprivation, population and council ownership. The Council has also established a cross-service approach to assessing the selected sites, bringing together operational knowledge and specialist expertise. Initial assessments have considered how the greenspaces are currently used, their accessibility and environmental value, as well as maintenance needs, practical constraints and opportunities for improvement. The work has provided a clear evidence base for community engagement, detailed site design and the development of a coordinated greenspace infrastructure plan.

[Read the full case study.](#)



Sharing Local Practice: Cross Cutting Themes

Scottish local authorities are placing strong emphasis on the importance of biodiversity enhancement, community involvement, partnership working and the practical challenges of delivery and maintenance. Councils are developing a growing interest in nature-based approaches, increasing collaboration between local authorities and external organisations, and a recognition of the role greenspaces can play in supporting communities and wellbeing.

1: Biodiversity Enhancement & Habitat Creation

Councils are introducing or expanding wildflower meadows, naturalised grassland and pollinator-friendly habitats. Additionally, local authorities are placing emphasis on the selection of appropriate planting mixes, allowing time for habitats to establish, and adapting management practices to support biodiversity outcomes.



Aberdeen City Council: The Council has established a range of wildflower sites using different seed mixes and management approaches. Learning from early trials has informed habitat creation work, with some sites now successfully supporting a high proportion of established wildflower species and requiring annual cut-and-lift management.

East Lothian Council: Biodiversity improvements, pollinator areas and nature network activity are being incorporated within wider open space planning and management discussions. The Council is also using capital funding for specialist machinery to support cut-and-lift work.

North Lanarkshire Council: Biodiversity interventions include wetland planting, pollinator-friendly areas and habitat creation linked to Nature Towns and Cities work. The project is also considering how wet areas and steep banks can be adapted to support biodiversity while responding to operational mowing challenges.

Perth and Kinross Council: The Council has established a substantial programme of biodiversity management, including the creation of approximately 70 wildflower areas, reductions in grass cutting, and implementation of annual cut-and-lift management supported through dedicated enhancement funding.

2: Community Engagement & Local Stewardship

Local authorities are placing emphasis on involving communities in greenspace projects and building local ownership. The contributions of volunteers, community groups, friends groups and local residents is helping to support and sustain improvements.



City of Edinburgh Council: Community members have been involved in designing sites, participating in workshops and engaging with gardening activities supported through partnership working. A gardening officer has been helping local people gain confidence and skills to become involved in greenspace projects.

East Lothian Council: Friends groups, volunteers and local communities are involved in park improvement projects and contribute to local greenspace initiatives. The Council is also considering how community input can inform management plans for destination parks and groups of smaller sites.

Argyll and Bute Council: Community groups support activity within parks, including horticultural projects, planting activities and skills-based initiatives. The Council is recognising the importance of maintaining momentum when projects are dependent on key individuals.

Perth and Kinross Council: The Council has expanded community engagement in biodiversity monitoring through biodiversity initiative officers, volunteer surveys and public action days focused on wildlife and habitat improvement.

3: Partnership Working & External Support

Councils are utilising partnerships to provide expertise, funding opportunities, engagement support and additional capacity. Collaboration with charities, universities and community organisations is a key feature for many local authorities when developing greenspace initiatives and strategies.



Aberdeen City Council: Partnership working with Buglife has supported pollinator projects, funding applications, communications activity and community engagement. Collaboration with third-party organisations is enhancing communication about biodiversity projects and encouraging greater community engagement.

City of Edinburgh Council: The Council has worked with the University of Edinburgh and Groundswell on projects examining greenspace improvements and community experiences of those changes. Partnerships have also supported community gardening activity.

Argyll and Bute Council: The Council is working with community groups, schools, biodiversity officers and other partners to deliver a range of park and greenspace initiatives. Hermitage Park provides an example of this approach, with a Friends group supporting planting, horticultural learning and activities involving schools and mental health support groups.

North Ayrshire Council: North Ayrshire are working with the Scottish Wildlife Trust through the Irvine to Girvan Nature Network, emphasising the importance of operational teams being involved alongside environmental partners so that biodiversity projects remain practical and sustainable.

4: Health, Wellbeing & Access to Nature

Local authorities are increasingly recognising the links between greenspace, nature and wellbeing. Councils are supporting local people to access outdoor space more often and encouraging greater use of greenspaces.

Aberdeen City Council: A Green Health Map has been developed to help residents identify nearby parks, allotments, gardens and other greenspaces. The map includes over 160 points and allows people to search by postcode and filter different types of greenspace.



North Lanarkshire Council: The Nature Towns and Cities project has focused on areas

identified through deprivation mapping and environmental justice considerations, alongside wider objectives around improving local environments. The Council is also working with health partners on accessibility, interpretation and site design for people using community health pathways.

City of Edinburgh Council: The Nature Network project is focusing on connections between ecological improvement and benefits for local communities, including work in areas identified through deprivation measures. In Leith, planned improvements have combined ecological connectivity with the redesign of smaller sites alongside local communities.

5. Maintenance & Workforce Skills

Councils are increasingly embedding long-term maintenance considerations within the design and delivery of greenspace and biodiversity projects. This includes involving operational teams at an early stage, ensuring projects are maintainable in the longer term, and taking account of workforce, skills and equipment requirements.

North Lanarkshire Council: Grounds maintenance teams have been involved throughout project development, providing operational input on site design, management approaches and potential maintenance implications. Engagement has included senior managers, area managers and staff working on the ground, with feedback sought on issues such as fly-tipping, wet areas and steep banks.



City of Edinburgh Council: Operational teams have been involved in project planning, site visits and discussions on maintenance requirements, machinery and practical delivery considerations. Their detailed knowledge has informed design choices, while pilot projects are being limited to a scale that teams can maintain and learn from.

East Lothian Council: The Council is considering maintenance requirements and operational capacity as part of the development of open space strategies and management plans. Available capital funding has also been used to invest in machinery, alongside wider recognition of the importance of workforce capacity and sustainable revenue funding to support long-term delivery.

North Ayrshire Council: The Council places emphasis on involving operational teams in the design and implementation of biodiversity projects, with maintenance considerations incorporated from the outset.

Sharing Local practice - Summary of Initiatives

Aberdeen City Council

Biodiversity enhancement: The Council has established a range of wildflower sites using different seed mixes and management approaches. Learning from early trials has informed habitat creation work, with some sites now successfully supporting a high proportion of established wildflower species and requiring annual cut-and-lift management.

Building partnerships: Partnership working with Buglife has supported pollinator projects, funding applications, communications activity and community engagement. Collaboration with third-party organisations is enhancing communication about biodiversity projects and encouraging greater community engagement.

Supporting to access to nature: A Green Health Map has been developed to help residents identify nearby parks, allotments, gardens and other greenspaces. The map includes over 160 points and allows people to search by postcode and filter different types of greenspace.

Argyll and Bute Council

Community engagement: Community groups support activity within parks, including horticultural projects, planting activities and skills-based initiatives. The Council is recognising the importance of maintaining momentum when projects are dependent on key individuals.

Partnership working: The Council is working with community groups, schools, biodiversity officers and other partners to deliver a range of park and

greenspace initiatives. Hermitage Park provides an example of this approach, with a Friends group supporting planting, horticultural learning and activities involving schools and mental health support groups.

City of Edinburgh Council

Community Engagement: Community members have been involved in designing sites, participating in workshops and engaging with gardening activities supported through partnership working. A gardening officer has been helping local people gain confidence and skills to become involved in greenspace projects.

Partnership working: The Council has worked with the University of Edinburgh and Groundswell on projects examining greenspace improvements and community experiences of those changes. Partnerships have also supported community gardening activity.

Supporting access to nature: The Nature Network project is focusing on connections between ecological improvement and benefits for local communities, including work in areas identified through deprivation measures. In Leith, planned improvements have combined ecological connectivity with the redesign of smaller sites alongside local communities.

Maintenance: Operational teams have been involved in project planning, site visits and discussions on maintenance requirements, machinery and practical delivery considerations. Their detailed knowledge has informed design choices, while pilot projects are being limited to a scale that teams can maintain and learn from.

East Lothian Council

Creating diverse habitats: Biodiversity improvements, pollinator areas and nature network activity are being incorporated within wider open space planning and management discussions. The Council is also using capital funding for specialist machinery to support cut-and-lift work.

Community engagement: Friends groups, volunteers and local communities are involved in park improvement projects and contribute to local greenspace initiatives. The Council is also considering how community input can inform management plans for destination parks and groups of smaller sites.

Maintenance: The Council is considering maintenance requirements and operational capacity as part of the development of open space strategies and management plans. Available capital funding has also been used to invest in machinery, alongside wider recognition of the importance of workforce capacity and sustainable revenue funding to support long-term delivery.

North Ayrshire Council

Partnership working: North Ayrshire are working with the Scottish Wildlife Trust through the Irvine to Girvan Nature Network, emphasising the importance of operational teams being involved alongside environmental partners so that biodiversity projects remain practical and sustainable.

Maintenance: The Council places emphasis on involving operational teams in the design and implementation of biodiversity projects, with maintenance considerations incorporated from the outset.

North Lanarkshire Council

Creating diverse habitats: Biodiversity interventions include wetland planting, pollinator-friendly areas and habitat creation linked to Nature Towns and Cities work. The project is also considering how wet areas and steep banks can be adapted to support biodiversity while responding to operational mowing challenges.

Access to nature: The Nature Towns and Cities project has focused on areas identified through deprivation mapping and environmental justice considerations, alongside wider objectives around improving local environments. The Council is also working with health partners on accessibility, interpretation and site design for people using community health pathways.

Maintenance: Grounds maintenance teams have been involved throughout project development, providing operational input on site design, management approaches and potential maintenance implications. Engagement has included senior managers, area managers and staff working on the ground, with feedback sought on issues such as fly-tipping, wet areas and steep banks.

Creating diverse habitats: The Council has established a substantial programme of biodiversity management, including the creation of approximately 70 wildflower areas, reductions in grass cutting, and implementation of annual cut-and-lift management supported through dedicated enhancement funding.

Community engagement: The Council has expanded community engagement in biodiversity monitoring through biodiversity initiative officers, volunteer surveys and public action days focused on wildlife and habitat improvement.