

LEEDS ACCESS TO PARKS AND GREEN SPACES REPORT

- 2026 -

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and Jennie Gray

FOREWORD



Leeds City Council recognises the vital role that high-quality research plays in shaping effective policy and ensuring that limited public resources are directed to achieve the greatest benefit for our residents.

Evidence-led decision-making remains central to our work, particularly as we seek to enhance the accessibility, quality, and inclusivity of our city's public spaces.

Our Parks and Green Spaces Strategy sets out a clear commitment to making Leeds' parks and green spaces "Accessible for All." In this context, we were pleased to collaborate with the University of Leeds in supporting this important research into the accessibility of these valued spaces, and in identifying opportunities for future improvement.

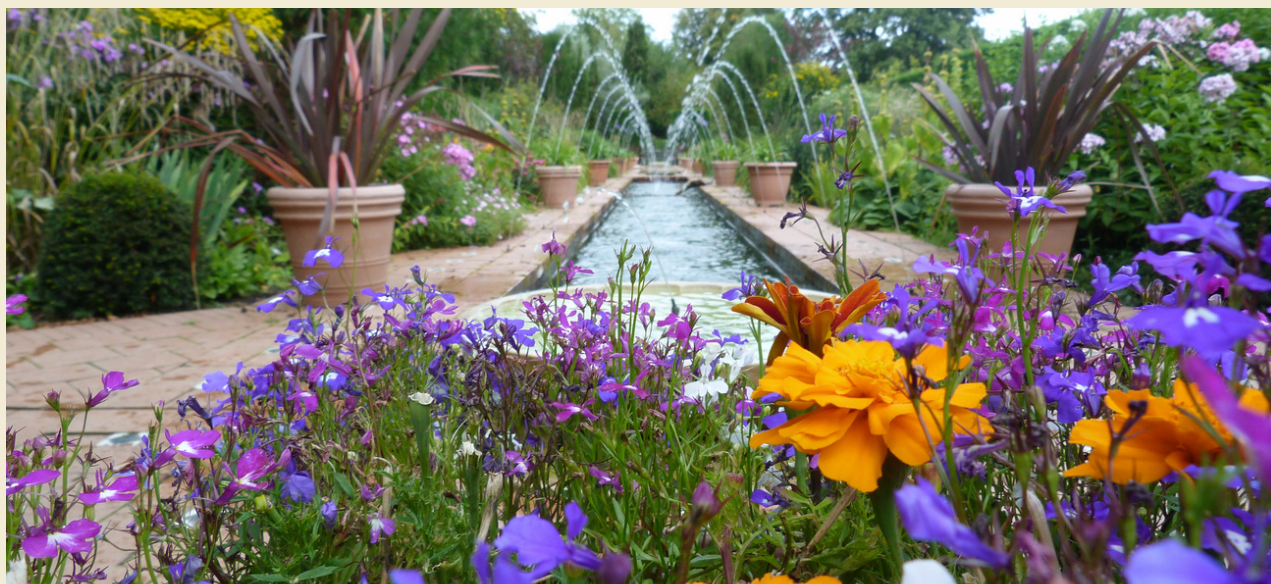
The findings presented in this report are encouraging. It is particularly heartening to note that more than 98% of survey respondents visit Leeds' parks each year, with 72% doing so on a weekly basis. This demonstrates the significant role that our green spaces play in the everyday lives of residents, supporting physical activity, relaxation, social connection, and engagement with the natural environment – all of which have proven benefits for health and wellbeing. Furthermore, it is reassuring that over 90% of respondents are happy with their park's condition, reflecting the ongoing efforts to maintain high standards across the city.

At the same time, the report reinforces insights gained through our own public engagement and national research: that some groups are less likely to spend time in parks and green spaces, and that barriers to access persist. The findings align closely with our strategic priorities—namely, to provide high-quality, child-friendly, and accessible parks that are managed in ways that support climate resilience and biodiversity. They also highlight areas where further improvements are needed, such as addressing anti-social behaviour and enhancing disabled access, to ensure that all residents feel welcomed and able to benefit from these spaces. We are committed to delivering these improvements where-ever possible.

On behalf of Leeds City Council, I would like to thank the University of Leeds for their dedication and professionalism in undertaking this research. The insights provided will play an important role in shaping the future of our parks and green spaces, ensuring they remain inclusive, accessible, and valued by all who live in and visit Leeds.

**COUNCILLOR JAMES GIBSON,
EXECUTIVE MEMBER FOR ENVIRONMENT
LEEDS CITY COUNCIL**





Alhambra Gardens. Photo by Leeds City Council

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This report was authored by Dr Vikki Houlden, Dr Anna Barker, and Dr Jennie Gray, as part of an Economic and Social Research Council funded research project: 'Green AWARE: Greenspace Access, Wellbeing, and Resident Equality', University of Leeds [ES/Y003268/1], 2024–2026. The collection of the survey data and production of the findings on which this report is based has been supported by many people at the University of Leeds and Leeds City Council. The survey sampling strategy was designed by Frank Perrins, Leeds City Council. We would like to thank our project partners, Leeds City Council Climate, Energy and Green Spaces Service, especially Emma Trickett, for their support. We would like to thank all the members of Leeds City Council and Leeds Parks and Green Spaces Forum who contributed ideas to a workshop in March 2026 at which the findings and recommendations for report were first presented and discussed. We are grateful to all members of the project's Advisory Board for consulting on the research development. We would also like to thank all the people, parks groups, and other community organisations who gave their time to promote and complete the survey.

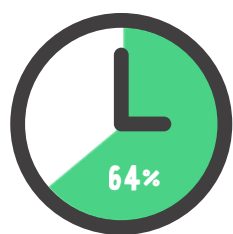


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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Everyone should have access to quality parks and green spaces near to where they live: it's important for our health, happiness, and environment. But not everyone has the same opportunities, and even what "access" means can differ from person to person and place to place. Through a survey and discussion groups, this research explores how to make Leeds' parks and green spaces as welcoming, safe, and accessible as possible.



1,877 Leeds residents responded to the survey. Some 72.3% visited a green space at least once a week, and almost **two thirds (64%)** stayed for up to an hour each time. Some people visited more frequently than others.



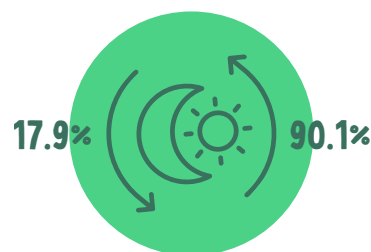
Women were around **10%** more likely than **men** to visit every day.

South Asian people were around **5%** more likely than **White British** people to stay for over 30mins.



Most people had lots of positive things to say about the green space they visited most often (what we call "their park"). For example:

Although most people felt safe using their park during the day, many people **avoided** using their park after dark, when just 17.9% of people felt safe (compared to over 90% during the day).



Almost half (48.5%) avoided their park at certain times of the day or week. **Women, people under 50, and those with financial struggles** were most likely to avoid their park

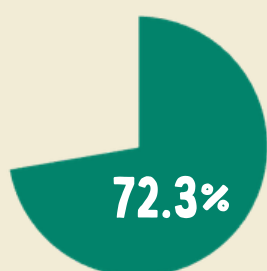
at some point, often after dark or at busy times when there is competition for park assets like playgrounds. Avoidance was often due to either overcrowding or safety concerns relating to fear of crime, antisocial behaviour, and the presence of motor vehicles

Some people who responded were "infrequent visitors" (12.4%) who visited less than once a month. Students and disabled people were the most common infrequent visitors.

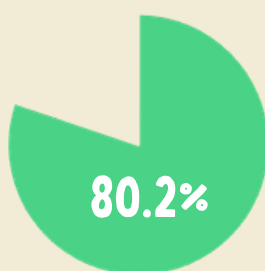
Disabled people were twice as likely to never visit than non-disabled people.



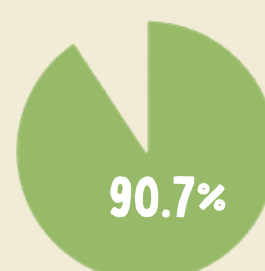
Perceptions of safety, accessibility, and lack of time were the main barriers to using parks and green spaces, though nearly all those who visited infrequently (88%) said they would like to visit more often.



VISIT AT LEAST ONCE A WEEK



ARE SATISFIED WITH THEIR PARK



ARE HAPPY WITH THEIR PARK CONDITION

Almost half (49%) of respondents did not feel safe after dark, 48% reported lack of access to toilets, and 33% were concerned about crime or antisocial behaviour. Issues with dogs off leash were also reported by many.



According to respondents, their **top priorities** for improving green spaces in Leeds were:

#1 KEEP PARKS CLEAN AND MAINTAINED



#2 MORE NATURE AND WILDLIFE



#3 BETTER DOG CONTROL



#4 BETTER PERSONAL SAFETY



#5 MORE CHILDREN'S ACTIVITIES



The most-visited green spaces in Leeds were **Roundhay Park, Woodhouse Moor, and Temple Newsam Estate**. The green spaces with the highest satisfaction tended to be further from people's homes and attract longer visits. They were all situated in more rural and affluent areas, smaller than average, and have a range of natural and more landscaped features that cater for all ages, including picnic areas and walking routes, and often featured playgrounds.

The **main challenges** to improving green spaces were identified as '**wicked problems**':

Inherently complex issues due to competing priorities, resource constraints, and practical challenges with implementation. These were:

- Providing and maintaining public toilets
- Managing dogs, dog mess, and encouraging responsible ownership
- Ensuring entrances are accessible (such as for pushchairs and mobility aids) while restricting prohibited off-road vehicles
- Improving safety and usability (often suggested through lighting) after dark without compromising nature.



In our **recommendations** section, we identify 5 **strategic priorities to increase equality in green spaces access across Leeds**. These focus on removing the barriers that lead to avoidance or infrequent visits, and considering how **accessibility extends beyond traditional physical needs**, to make green spaces as **accommodating as possible to the diverse communities**. For the full list of recommendations please see Section 6.

1. THE GREEN AWARE PROJECT

The **Green AWARE** (which stands for Access, Wellbeing, and Resident Equality) project was led by Dr Vikki Houlden, Dr Anna Barker, and Dr Jennie Gray at the University of Leeds, UK, and supported by funding from the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC), between 2024 and 2026. Working closely with Leeds and Bradford councils, the project was designed to understand how different people experience their local parks and green spaces, to help us make green spaces as welcoming, safe, and accessible as possible to everyone, wherever they live and whatever their background.

A note on terminology: Throughout this report, we will be referring to both 'parks' and 'green spaces'.

By 'green spaces', we mean any public green area where there is grass, trees, flowers, or other vegetation. This does not include private gardens but can include recreation grounds, woodland, green corridors and nature reserves, as well as more formal spaces such as parks, allotments, cemeteries? and sports pitches.

'Parks' are more specific and tend to be formally designated as a public area for recreation, often (but not always) featuring facilities such as paths, benches, and perhaps play areas for children.

In this report, we may use these terms interchangeably but will mostly use the term 'green space', to be as inclusive as possible of the types of spaces people use, recognising that these can take many forms.



Roundhay Park. Photo by Leeds City Council

1A. MEET THE TEAM



DR VIKKI HOULDEN
School of Geography,
University of Leeds

Principle Investigator

Vikki is an urban data scientist, with a passion for understanding why some people and places are healthier than others. She led the project, bringing her interest in how green spaces can support our health and wellbeing.



DR ANNA BARKER
School of Law,
University of Leeds

Co-Investigator

Having led previous parks surveys, Anna supported the development of the survey, focus groups, and turning the findings into practical and impactful recommendations. She also leads a programme of research on Safer Parks: Improving Access for Women and Girls.



DR JENNIE GRAY
School of Geography,
University of Leeds

Research Fellow

Jennie is an expert in mapping and inequalities, who is fascinated by people and their neighbourhoods. She was responsible for much of the background understanding of access to green spaces and led much of the survey data analysis.

1B. WHY WE DID THIS PROJECT

The Green AWARE project brings together background research, a public survey, focus groups with residents, workshops with (landowners) Leeds City Council, and data analysis to improve access to the city's public green spaces. We sought to understand what works well and where improvements are needed by listening to local communities, including those who use green spaces less or not at all, to identify barriers and opportunities for change.

Green spaces play a vital role in supporting physical and mental health, fostering social connections and community cohesion, and benefiting the environment by providing wildlife habitats and reducing risks such as flooding, pollution, and urban heat. However, access and experience are not equal. For example, research across the UK shows that women are more likely to feel unsafe, disabled people may face physical barriers, and those in deprived or minority communities often have less access to high-quality green space near to where they live.

The project therefore aims to understand how people in Leeds experience green spaces and, working with the Council, develop practical recommendations to make them more inclusive and accessible for everyone.

1C. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

We set out to answer three key questions:

1. How does living near green spaces affect whether people feel able to use them, across different places and groups
2. What features of green spaces help people feel welcome, included, and supported in their wellbeing?
3. What can be done to make green spaces easier for everyone to use, especially for those who face the biggest barriers?



2. INTRODUCTION TO THE SURVEY

2A. PARKS AND GREEN SPACES IN LEEDS

Leeds Parks and Countryside Service, part of Leeds City Council, manage 4,000 hectares of green space, which includes 72 parks, 76 nature conservation sites, and 174 playgrounds. There are 7 'major' parks in Leeds, all of which have been awarded Green Flag Award status, and 65 more localised 'community parks'. Current usage of parks and green spaces is estimated to be around 45 million adult visits per year. These visits are supported by hundreds of volunteers who help care for green spaces across their local area. Over 650 public events (from food festivals to community galas) are held in parks annually.



72

public parks



4000 HA

of green space



7

Green Flag
Awards



76

nature
conservation sites



170

playgrounds

2B. THE LEEDS ACCESS TO PARKS AND GREEN SPACES SURVEY

The Survey was conducted between March and June 2025, with residents able to complete either an online or a printed questionnaire. The opening questions asked residents for their post code and how often they visited green spaces within Leeds. This information was used to group respondents into 'frequent' and 'infrequent' users, as follows:

Frequent Users: Respondents who visited green spaces at least once a month were asked about the green space they visited most often (their "main park"). They reported how often they visited, their satisfaction with the space and its condition, and rated different aspects of accessibility.

Infrequent Users: Those visiting less than once a month were asked about their awareness of local green spaces, whether they wanted to visit more often, and where they spent their free time.

All Respondents: everyone was asked about any barriers that make it more difficult to use green spaces, and their priorities for improving them across their neighbourhood (not just their "main park"). They also provided demographic information and self-reported health to understand different experiences. The full questionnaire is in [Appendix A](#).

The survey was advertised in several ways. A random sample of 3,000 non-vacant private home addresses (i.e. excluding care homes or other residential institutions) were selected via Leeds City Council. These addresses were sent a postcard advertising the survey and inviting residents to complete it. A further 1,000 non-vacant private home addresses were randomly sampled from within the 10% most deprived local areas within Leeds, as classified by the English Indices of Multiple Deprivation, and were sent a paper version. This was to account for anticipated lower response rate, and potential barriers to accessing the online survey (such as internet access and digital literacy) in more deprived areas of the city. All residents could also request a paper version. All respondents were invited to opt in to a prize draw, where they could win £100 of high street vouchers, to encourage participation.

The survey was further publicised via local media (including the BBC website, BBC Radio Leeds, and local newspapers), the Council's website, and social media channels (Facebook, LinkedIn, Instagram), and targeted online adverts, particularly aimed at underrepresented groups such as younger adults, men, ethnic minorities, and residents in more deprived areas. The survey link was also shared universities, community groups, and 'Friends Of' groups.

2C. DATA JOINING

Collecting respondents' postcode and their 'main park' (most visited green space) allowed us to link additional data sets to the survey. Using the Office for National Statistics NSPL post code locations[1], we mapped each respondents' location to the centre of their postcode. Green space size and locations were obtained from several sources, due to the diversity of the types of parks green spaces reported: Ordnance Survey's Open Green Space Map[2], Leeds City Council's Greenspace Sites[3], Open Street Map[4], and the National Forest Inventory[5]. We then used Ordnance Survey's routing network[6] to calculate the distance travelled to each respondent's main park, and its size. Finally, linking postcodes to Lower Layer Super Output Areas (LSOAs) enabled us to include local deprivation levels using the English Indices of Multiple Deprivation[7] (IMD).

[1] ONS NSPL Online Latest Centroids, Available at: <https://geoportal.statistics.gov.uk/datasets/ons::nspl-online-latest-centroids-1/about>

[2] Ordnance Survey OS Open Greenspace, Available at: <https://www.ordnancesurvey.co.uk/products/os-open-greenspace>

[3] Leeds City Council Site Allocations Plan – Greenspace Sites, Available at: <https://strategic-planning-leedscscc.hub.arcgis.com/datasets/LeedsCC::site-allocations-plan-greenspace-sites/about>

[4] Open Street Map, Available at: <https://www.openstreetmap.org/>

[5] Forestry Commission National Forest Inventory GB 2024, Available at: https://data-forestry.opendata.arcgis.com/datasets/5a3efa283e81431b911b5c9872527ca5_O/about

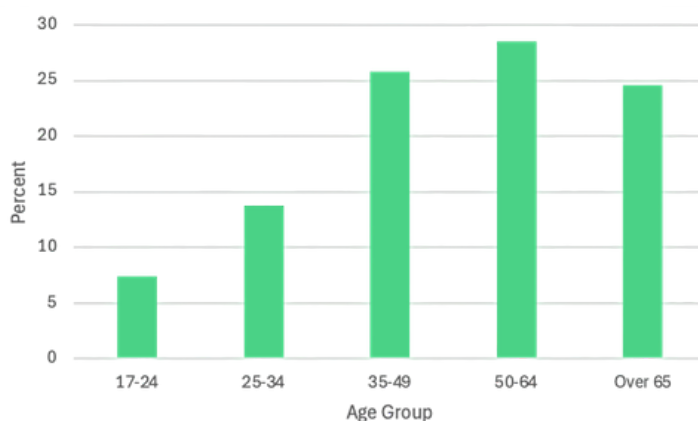
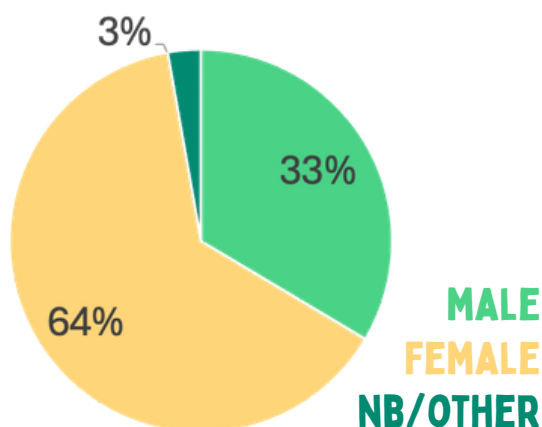
[6] Ordnance Survey OS Multi-modal Routing Network, Available at: <https://www.ordnancesurvey.co.uk/products/os-multi-modal-routing-network>

[7] UK Government English Indices of Multiple Deprivation 2025, Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/english-indices-of-deprivation-2025>

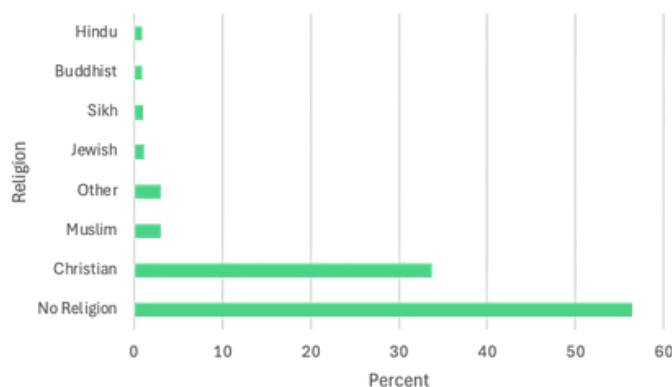
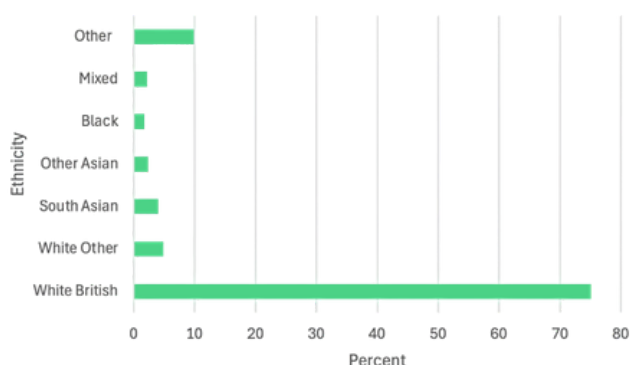
3. PARKS AND GREEN SPACE USE IN LEEDS

3A. WHO COMPLETED THE SURVEY?

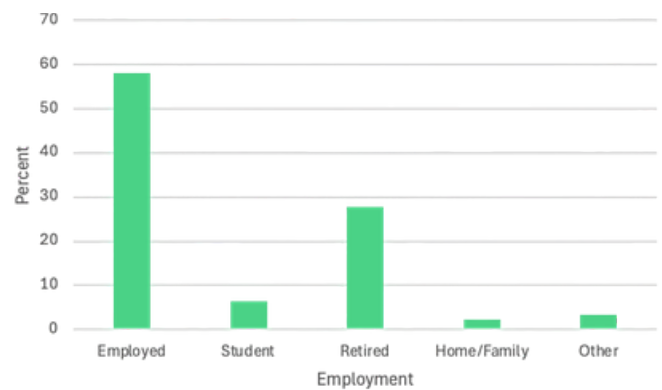
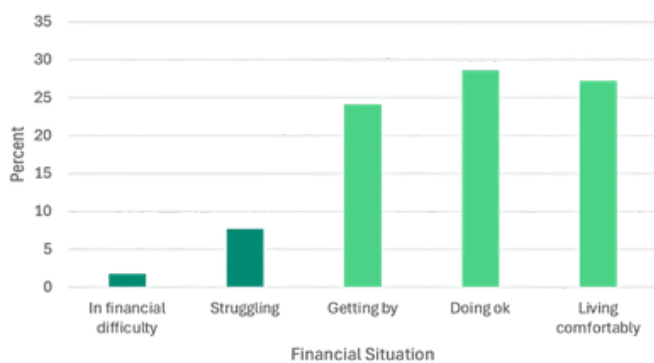
Valid responses were received from 1,877 people in Leeds. Significantly more females (1127, 64.2%) than males (589, 33.5%) responded, in terms of sex. When asked about their gender, 64% identified as female, 33% as male, and 3% as non-binary or another gender. Around a quarter were aged 35–49, 50–64, or over 65. The smallest group was those aged under 25, at just 7.4%.



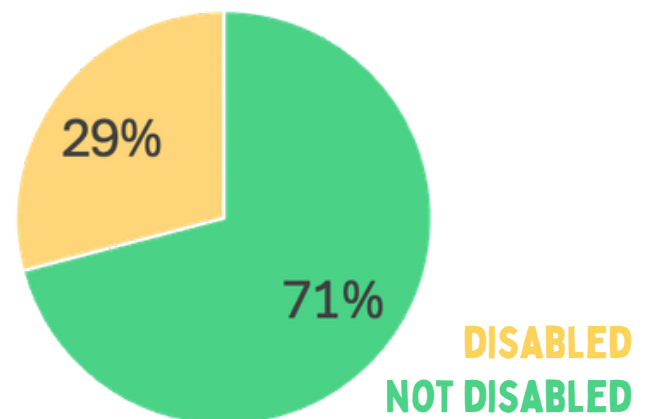
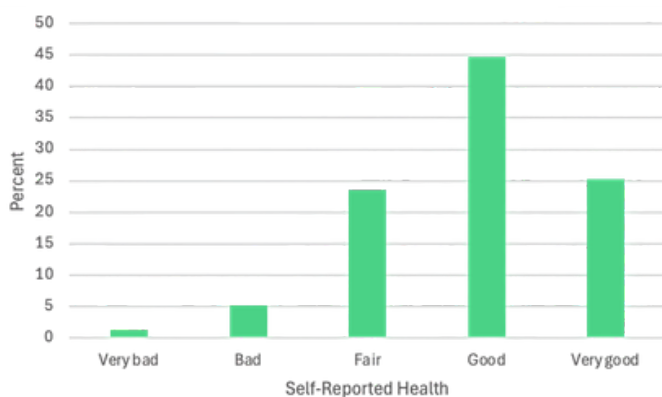
Three quarters (75.9%) identified as White British, followed by 'Other White' at just 3.7%. There were also small numbers of other ethnicities, including Indian (2.6%), Pakistani (1.2%), Chinese (1.1%), or Other Asian (1.3%). One point seven percent were Black, and almost 1% (0.91%) were mixed White and Asian. Most reported that they were of no religion (56.4), with the most reported religion being Christian (33.7%), followed by Muslim (3%).



Over half were employed (58.0%), while 6.3% were students and 27.8% were retired. Similar numbers (2.2%) were either seeking employment or looking after home or family. When asked how well respondents and their households were managing financially, most reported that they were reasonably secure, either "doing ok" (28.6%) or "living comfortably" (27.2%). Almost a quarter were "getting by" (24.1), while a few were either "struggling" (7.7%) or "in financial difficulty" (1.8%). Around three quarters of people had access to a private or shared garden (77.7%)

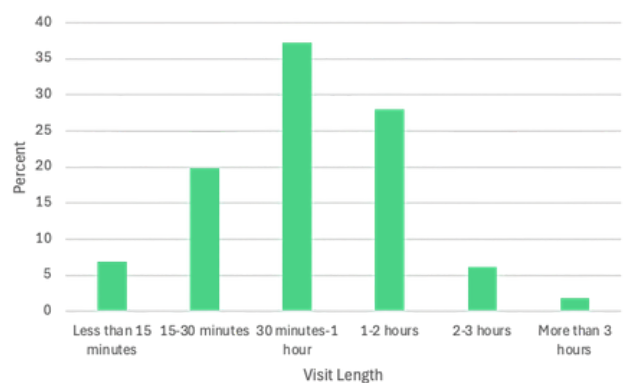
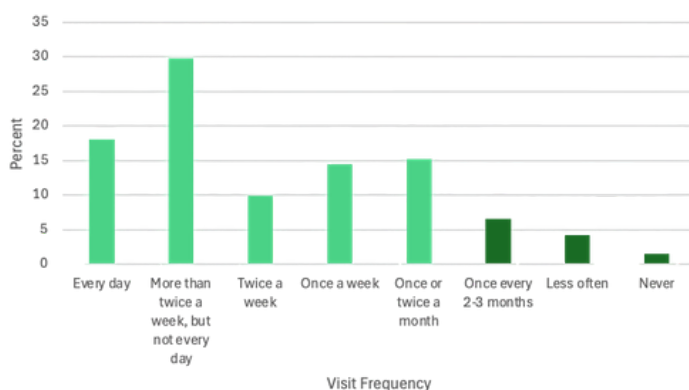


Almost a third (31.7%) reported that they had a physical or mental health condition lasting over 12 months. For 29.1%, this affected their ability to carry out day-to-day activities, impacting 21.7% “a little” and a further 7.4% “a lot”. In total, this led to us classifying 29% as ‘disabled’. Women, older people and retired residents were slightly overrepresented in the sample, compared to Census statistics.

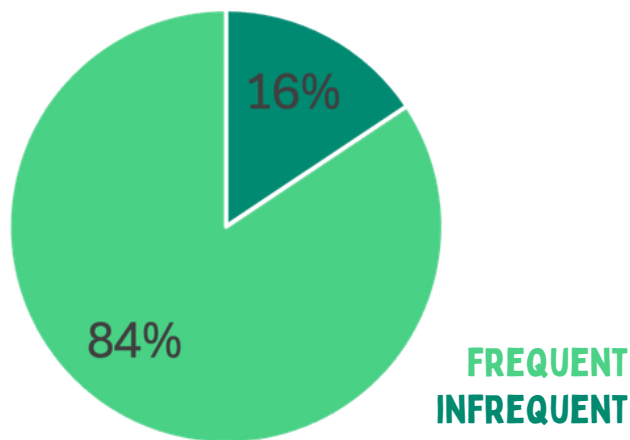


3B. GREEN SPACE VISITING PATTERNS

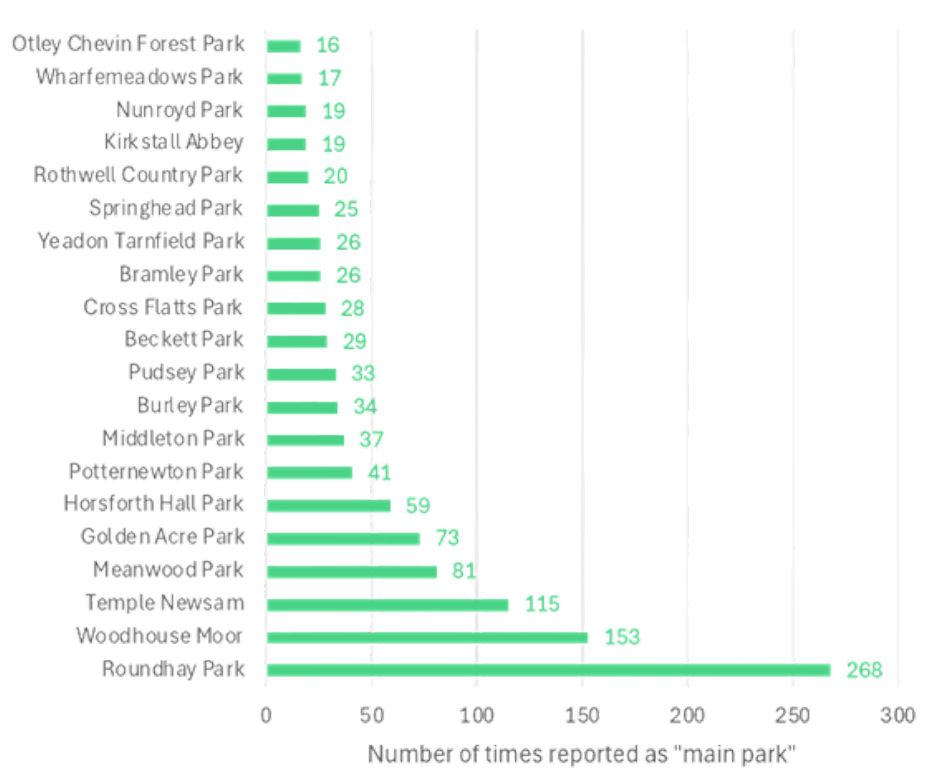
Most people (72.3%) visited parks and green spaces in Leeds at least once a week. Some 19.8% visited more than twice a week, but not every day, while 18% visited every day, and similar amounts visited between once a week and one a month (14.5% and 15.3%, respectively). Respondents were ‘infrequent’ (dark green) visitors if they went to a park less than every month; 12.4% fitted this description (233), with 1.5% of people saying they never visited a park or green space in Leeds, while the remaining 1644 were our ‘frequent’ visitors. Most infrequent visitors were still likely to visit between 4 and 6 times a year.



The remainder of this section refers to **frequent users only**, describing their experiences of their main park (most-used green space).



There were 198 different green spaces reported as a main park across Leeds. The 20 most popular are shown above. By far the most popular was Roundhay Park (269), followed at some distance by Woodhouse Moor (153) and Temple Newsam (115). Meanwood and Golden Acre Parks were similarly popular, with 81 and 73 reports, respectively.

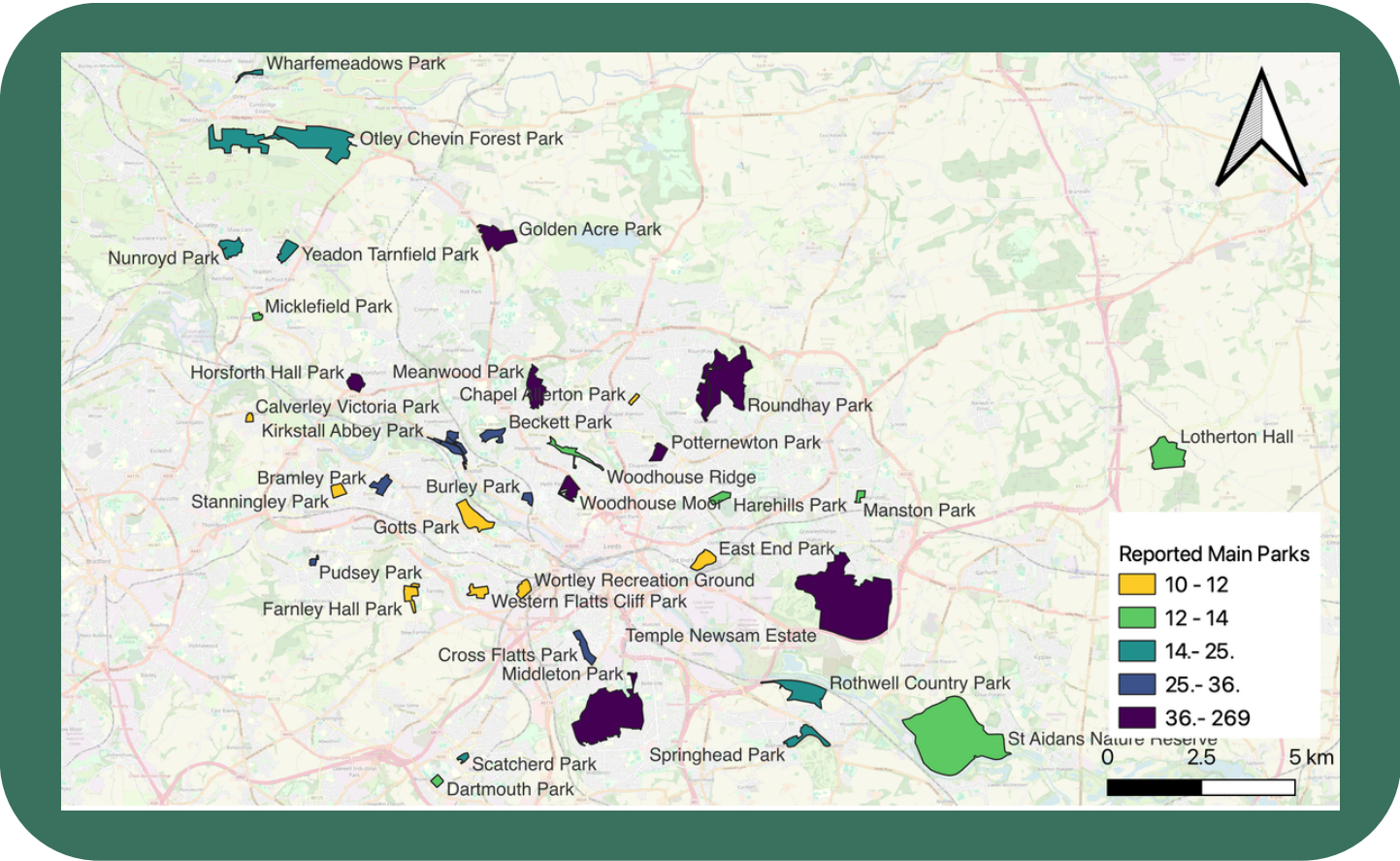


When visiting their main park, most people spent at least 30 minutes there. Almost a third spent between 30 minutes and one hour (32.5%), with a quarter (24.5%) spending 1–2 hours. A similar amount (23.5%) usually spent up to 30 minutes in their park.

Respondents were more likely to visit more frequently in the spring and summer months when the weather is generally good, especially every day (around a fifth of visitors), while a similar proportion visited once a month or less in the winter.

Visit Frequency	Every day	More than twice a week	Twice a week	Once a week	Every two weeks	Once a month	Less often
Summer	19.6%	36.0%	15.4%	13.8%	9.6%	4.6%	0.9%
Winter	12.0%	25.9%	13.0%	17.7%	12.1%	11.4%	8.0%

The map below shows the location of all green spaces in Leeds reported as a “main park” by at least 10 respondents.



© OpenStreetMap

3C. WHY DO PEOPLE IN LEEDS VISIT GREEN SPACES?

Respondents could select up to 5 main reasons they visited their main park. Almost two thirds (64.7) said this was for a walk; for some this was as a route to somewhere else (18.8%), or to walk their dog (18.55). Being in the natural environment was a common reason: over half (51.4%) said they went for the fresh air, while others visited to enjoy nature (40.8%), or to relax (35.8%).



64.7% of green space users visited for a walk



51.4% of green space users went for the fresh air

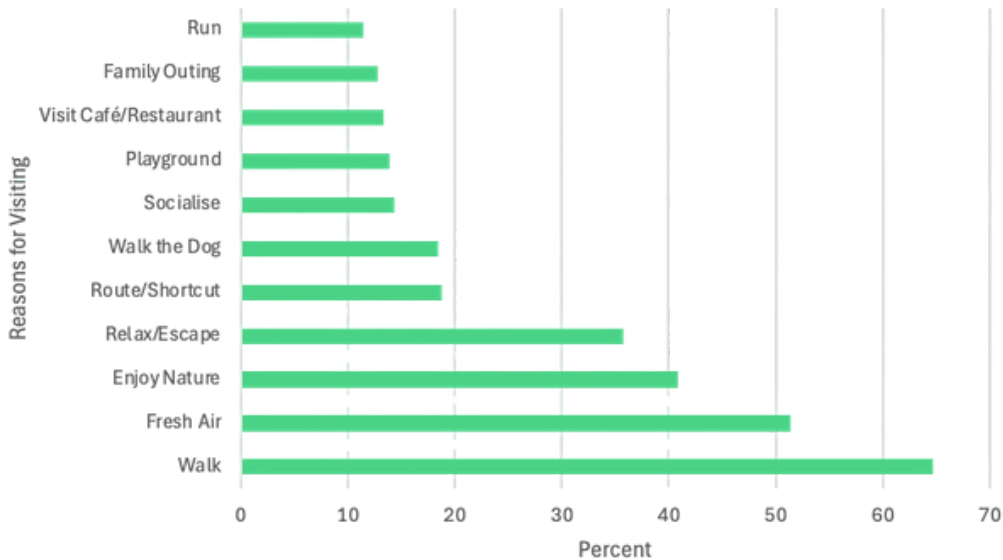


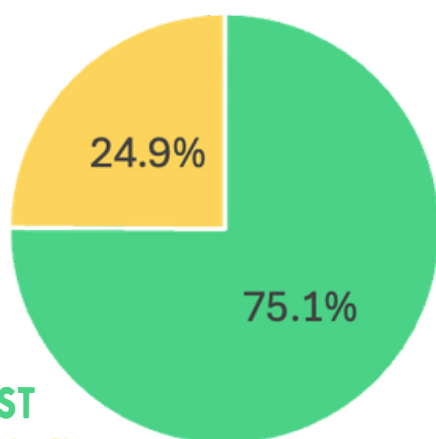
40.8% of green space users enjoyed nature



35.8% of green space uses visited to relax or escape

Social reasons included to socialise (14.4%), spending time on a family outing (12.8%), or for a social group (3.6%). Exercise was a common motivator; in addition to walking, running (11.5%), cycling (5.1%), outdoor gyms (0.4%), skateboarding (0.3%), and attending group exercise (4.5%) or sports games (5.8%) were selected. Facilities in parks encouraged visits, with 13.9% using the playground, and a similar amount (13.3%) going to cafés in the park; historical features (3.1%), allotments (0.9%), and paid activities (1.4%) or events (5.3%) also attracted residents.





For three quarters of respondents (75.1%), their most-used park was the closest park or green space to their home, while the remainder mostly visited a park further away. When asked why they frequented their park rather than one closer to home, the following **push** and **pull** factors emerged.

NEAREST NOT NEAREST

Size and Space: Most often, preferred parks are much larger, more open, and function as destination parks rather than small local green spaces.

"It's a 'proper' park, nearer ones are 'green spaces'."

"It is a larger green space – especially to walk/run around."

Nature and Landscape: Parks that feel beautiful, calm, or natural, which include woodland, wildlife, flowers, or water elements, provided a sense of escape for many.

"It feels a bit wilder and more like I am getting out of the city."

"Woodland, peaceful waterfall."

Quality and Maintenance: Many respondents avoid their nearest park because it is perceived as more run-down, dirty, vandalised, or poorly maintained, especially compared to the park they choose to visit

"Often messy, dog poo, broken glass."

"Untidy and pavements can be uneven/unsafe."

"It feels unloved and therefore less safe."

Safety and Antisocial Behaviour: relating to antisocial park users (often described as 'youths' or 'gangs'), uncontrolled or aggressive dogs, drink and drug users. People often travel further to parks that feel safer due to higher footfall.

"Street drinkers, drug takers and dealers – I was assaulted in the park."

"I had a panic attack after being frightened by a dog."

Facilities for all Ages: People often choose parks with more to do, especially when visiting with children or grandchildren. Preferred facilities include playgrounds, cafés/coffee vans, toilets, bowling greens, sports pitches, and parking.

"It has a cafe and toilets."

"Parking easier. Flatter."

"Better bowling green."

Convenience and Routines: Many people choose parks that fit naturally into daily routines, or are on the way to other destinations, such as school or work.

"On my way to work."

"I walk through it to get to university."

Opportunities for Walking and Running: Including longer, more scenic routes for walking with or without a dog, running, or joining a group such as Parkrun.

"Longer walk, more scenic."

"Better suited for dog walking."

"I run a running club and Roundhay Park is one of our bases."

Cultural and Emotional Attachment: some parks were chosen due to personal ties.

"This is the park I know best from childhood."

"My dad's ashes are scattered there."

Accessibility and Inclusion: spaces with more level surfaces, places to sit, and accessible routes can be easier to use than those merely nearby, especially for those with mobility needs such as wheelchairs or prams.

"Flat paths suitable for my wheeled walker."

"More benches – I'm disabled so this is a huge factor."

Certain green spaces were highlighted several times for having particularly strong pull factors, and are often larger, destination parks that draw visitors from a wider area:

Roundhay Park: often mentioned for the size and variety of space available, including cafés, playgrounds, scenery such as lakes, and activities such as Parkrun.

Meanwood Park: praised for its landscapes including woodland, as well as being on commuting routes



Roundhay Park. Photo by Leeds City Council



Meanwood Park. Photo by Leeds City Council

Temple Newsam: highlighted for its extensive size and facilities on offer, including cafés, farm, variety of landscapes, suitable for walking and dog owners.



Temple Newsam Estate. Photo by Leeds City Council

3D. WHAT DO LEEDS RESIDENTS THINK OF THEIR GREEN SPACES?



Over 80% of frequent visitors are **satisfied** with their main park. A total of 51.2% said they agreed with the statement “I am satisfied with my park”, while 28.9% strongly agreed.

Over 90% of visitors in Leeds are **happy with the condition** of their main park. This comprises 20.9% rating their park as “acceptable”, 45.2% as “good”, and 28.6% as “very good”.



Green Space Accessibility

Access to green space is more than just how easy it is to get to and move around, and research [1] suggests there are up to 6 dimensions which give a more holistic overview of accessibility and better consider the diverse needs of residents. We applied this 6As of Accessibility framework to obtain a detailed picture of green space accessibility in Leeds. The 6 dimensions are:

- **Availability:** Are green spaces available in sufficient size and quantity?
- **Accessibility:** Are green spaces easily reachable and navigable?
- **Accommodation:** Do green spaces meet diverse user needs?
- **Affordability:** Are green spaces temporally and financially affordable?
- **Acceptability:** Are green spaces safe, and socially and culturally acceptable?
- **Awareness:** Are residents aware of green spaces and their benefits, and feeling confident to use them?

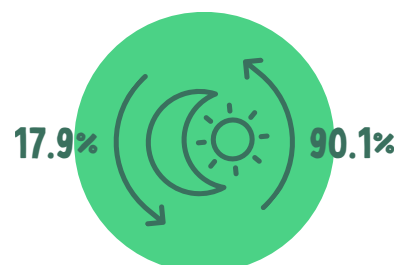
All except “awareness” were measured in the Frequent User section of the survey. For infrequent users, we asked whether they knew about the parks and green spaces available for them (see **Section 2b**). We also consider this when measuring potential barriers to green space in **Section 4c**, as well as temporal constraints which limit affordability, such as being too busy at home or work to visit green spaces.

[1] Gray, J., Houlden, V., and Barker, A., 2025. Beyond Proximity: a conceptual framework and rapid evidence review of barriers and inequities in urban greenspace access. [Preprint]. SocArXiv. Available at: https://doi.org/10.31235/osf.io/cmt46_v1

A of Accessibility	Percent Agreement
<i>Availability</i>	
My park is big enough	86.2
<i>Accessibility</i>	
My park is within easy walking or wheeling distance	76.7
The paths and layout of my park make it easy to get around	87.4
<i>Accommodation</i>	
My park has nature and wildlife that appeal to me	76.6
My park has facilities that meet most of my needs (e.g. car parks, playgrounds, benches, toilets)	58.5
There are events in my park that appeal to me	36.9
<i>Affordability</i>	
Activities and events in my park are affordable	40.9
<i>Acceptability</i>	
My park is clean and well-maintained	77.1
My park feels safe during the day time	90.1
My park feels safe after dark	17.9
My park feels welcoming	79.6
Overall, I am satisfied with my park	80.2

Overall, *Availability* scored highest, followed by *Accessibility* (what we often traditionally think of as 'access', for parks to be easily reachable and navigable), both averaging close to 80% agreement. The other 'As' have more scope for improvement, especially in terms of *Accommodating* diverse needs and ensuring activities are *Affordable*, both of which averaged closer to 50% agreement; three quarters of respondents reported favourable views of appealing nature and wildlife in their green spaces, but just 36.9% felt the same about activities and events.

One striking difference was between perceptions of safety in the daytime vs after dark, with agreement falling from 90% to just 18%.



Green Space Improvements

Frequent visitors were asked one main thing in their park they would like to improve. The key themes that emerged, accompanied by illustrative examples from the free-text responses were:

Safety and Antisocial Behaviour: including increase of security such as park wardens and CCTV cameras, improving dog control, and tackling antisocial behaviour, which may include reducing violence, vandalism, fireworks, drug use, and motorised vehicles. There was a strong focus on measures to make the park feel safe for women, children, and people walking through.

"Remove... dog fouling and out of control dogs off-lead"

"Stop the groups of people hanging around, smoking weed and causing vandalism"

Lighting and Visibility: especially along paths, playgrounds, and during the (early) evening, to extend useable hours and reduce loitering.

"Lighting so loitering doesn't happen... I know a lot of people who use it as a cut through... and would feel safer with lighting"

Toilets and Facilities: including baby changing and accessible toilet facilities, and increasing availability of cafés, benches, and parking spaces for the park or green space.

"A cafe and toilets would be great and would broaden the use of the park. I would also like to see more/some public art"

Play Areas and Young People's Facilities: focussing on the need to repair, expand or modernise children's play spaces, as well as providing spaces for teenagers to play and hang out and increasing sports areas and outdoor gym equipment. Increase availability and reduce prices of bowling greens.

"The children's play areas, there's a lot that has been vandalised and not replaced"

"More play provision for older children so they don't feel the need to ruin the equipment made for younger children"

"[make] access to bowling greens more affordable"

Maintenance and Cleanliness: comprising presence and frequency of emptying of bins, reducing litter and fly tipping, repairing deteriorating walls and paths, and removing graffiti.
"A few more bins for when people come out on hot days and have BBQ's and leave rubbish behind or regular clean ups of the communal areas"

Nature and Climate: increasing flowers, trees, and hedgerows to add colour and diversity.
"Plant more trees and have more areas dedicated to wildlife eg wildflower meadows. Too much of this park is simply cut grass."

Sports and Recreation: including restoring, maintaining, and better marking out of football, tennis, and basketball facilities, providing outdoor gyms, and increasing equipment for teenagers to play and hang out.

"More exercise equipment like bikes, other parks have things like this"

"Integrate more team sports eg netball court, rounders pitch, marked out football pitch"

Activities and Events: offering more family-friendly and community events, as well as those focussed on older people.

"More community activities / ability to coordinate community events"

3E. SUMMARY OF FINDINGS FOR GREEN SPACE USE IN LEEDS

- 1,977 residents provided valid responses
- Women, older people and retired residents were slightly overrepresented in the sample
- The vast majority visited parks and green spaces in Leeds regularly, with almost half visiting more than twice a week or spending up to two hours in their main park, and most (over 80%) were very satisfied with their park and rated its condition positively
- Over three quarters of respondents visited their nearest green space more than any other
- The most common reasons for visiting were related to exercise and spending time outdoors for fresh air, relaxation, or visiting nature. Two thirds visited for a walk.
- Residents felt much safer in their green spaces during the day than after dark
- Green spaces were generally felt to be available and accessible, but accommodation of user needs and the acceptability of the state of the green space may have most room for improvement. Activities in the spaces could also be made more affordable.
- Suggested improvements centred on facilities including children's play areas, toilets, and lighting, as well as safety elements such as maintenance, cleanliness, and tackling antisocial behaviour

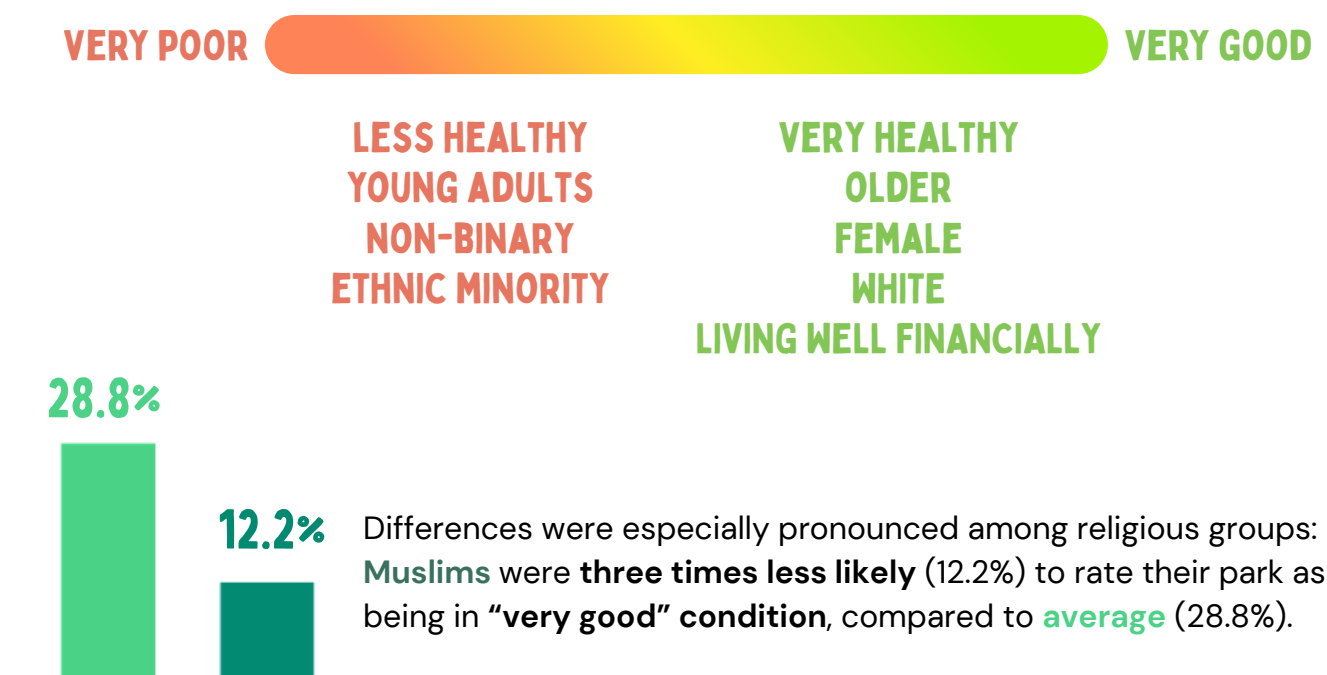
4. PARK USERS: HOW DO DIFFERENT PEOPLE EXPERIENCE GREEN SPACES?

Most people using green spaces in Leeds visit at least once a week (72.3%) and stay for at least 30 minutes (73.1%); around two thirds regularly stay for up to an hour. Few statistical differences were observed between social and demographic groups, though two key patterns emerged:



4A. WHO IS HAPPY WITH THEIR PARK?

Respondents were asked how they would rate the current condition of their main park, on a scale of “very good” to “very poor”. Certain groups were more likely to rate their park’s condition as “good” or “very good”: people who were very healthy, over 50, female, White, or more financially comfortable. Certain groups were more likely to rate their park’s condition as “poor” or “very poor”, including: younger adults, non-binary people, and minority ethnic groups.

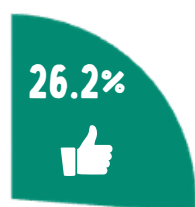
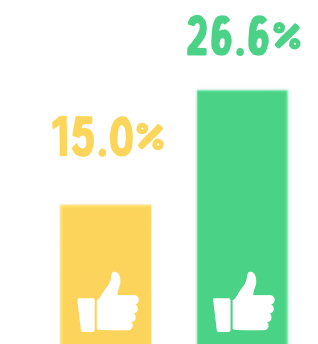


4B. WHO IS SATISFIED WITH THEIR PARK?

Related to park condition is respondents' general satisfaction with their park, measured via strength of agreement with the statement "Overall, I am satisfied with my park"; on a scale of "strongly agree" to "strongly disagree".. As expected, patterns here were very similar to those observed for park condition.

Under-25s were less likely to be satisfied, being around **half** as likely as the **average** respondent to "strongly agree" that they were satisfied with their park.

Women were slightly more likely than men to report satisfaction with their park. Healthier people, and those who were more comfortable financially, were generally more satisfied with their park.



Just 68% of Asian people were satisfied, compared to an average of over 80% across the sample. This may overlap with religion; on average, Muslims were the least satisfied with their parks, with over 25% reporting that they "disagreed" or "strongly disagreed" that they were satisfied.

4C. WHAT GETS IN THE WAY OF VISITING GREEN SPACES?

Barriers to Access

Respondents were asked whether a variety of factors made it more difficult for them to visit parks and green spaces in Leeds. They could select as many as they liked. We termed these "barriers", and they cover several themes: accessibility and transportation, facilities and maintenance, safety and comfort, social and environmental factors, activities and events, and personal barriers.

Safety was a major concern. Almost half (48.5%) of respondents reported not feeling safe after dark, while a third (32.8%) were concerned about crime or antisocial behaviour. Twenty-four per cent (23.8) were concerned about dogs being off leash, while others reported poor lighting (20.7%), fear of harassment (11.1%), feeling unsafe during the day (6.3%), and worries of getting lost (1.2%) as barriers. Dogs were a particularly strong barrier for older adults (over 50s), and infrequent visitors, suggesting that this barrier affected visit frequency.

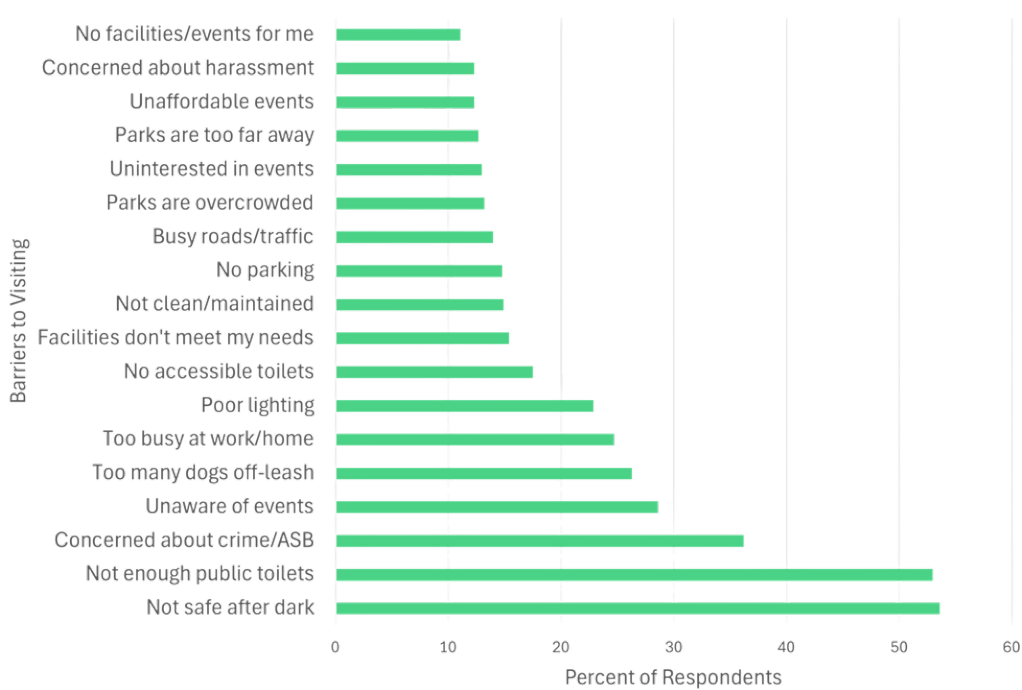
Facilities were limited by a lack of public toilets for nearly half of respondents (47.9%), with a lack of accessible toilets especially concerning 15.8%. Facilities not meeting individual needs (14%) and not being adequately clean or maintained (13.5%) were reasonably common.



In terms of accessibility, lack of parking affected 13.4% of respondents, and busy roads en route limited access for 12.7%. Within the green spaces, 7.8% found paths and layouts too difficult to use (e.g. steps, slopes, uneven surfaces). Green spaces were perceived as overcrowded by 11.9% of respondents, while, conversely, 5.9% reported they felt empty or isolated.

Facilities and events within parks were contentious. Some people were not interested in events (11.7%) or felt that the events weren't "for them" (10.7%) or were activities they would not enjoy (8.1%). For some, events were a barrier because they were unaffordable (11.1%).

Some of the barriers were personal. Almost a quarter (22.4%) were too busy with responsibilities at home or work to visit as often as they'd like, with 5.8% of people limited by their caring responsibilities. Physical and mental health challenges restricted 9.7% and 5.7% of residents, respectively.



Barriers also differed between groups. The number of reported barriers was significantly higher for under 25s, women, South Asian people, and disabled people, compared to over 65s, men, White British people, and non-disabled people.

The types of barriers were important. Those reporting that their health affected their day-to-day activities a lot had markedly different barriers to the overall population, with their physical health being their top barrier to access. Their mental health and lack of accessible toilets also ranked considerably higher. More broadly, those classified as disabled highlighted their physical challenges alongside lack of facilities including lighting and accessible toilets as restricting their visits.

There was considerable overlap between older adults (over 50s), those in poorer health, and disabled people. Potentially exacerbating their physical challenges, respondents describing that their health was “poor” or “very poor” more frequently reported that facilities available within the green space, such as car parks, play areas, and benches, did not meet their needs. Paths and layouts were also more difficult to navigate for this group. This might include physical obstacles such as steps, slopes, and uneven surfaces.

Similarly, women were more likely to report challenges in navigability of paths than other genders, potentially due to an overlap with caregiving responsibilities and taking pushchairs to green spaces. Women were also most likely to report safety-related barriers, specifically not feeling safe after dark, and feeling green spaces are too empty or isolated, which can lead to feelings of vulnerability.

Younger adults (those aged under 34) reported time pressures of being “too busy at home or work” more commonly than any other age group.

YOUNG ADULTS
“I’m too busy at home or work”

DISABLED PEOPLE
“I have physical health challenges”
“Poor lighting”
“There aren’t enough accesible toilets”

WOMEN
“I don’t feel safe after dark”

“Parks feel empty or isolated”

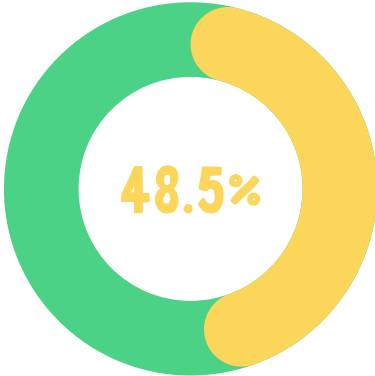
“Paths or layout are too difficult to navigate”

POOR HEALTH
“I have physical health challenges”

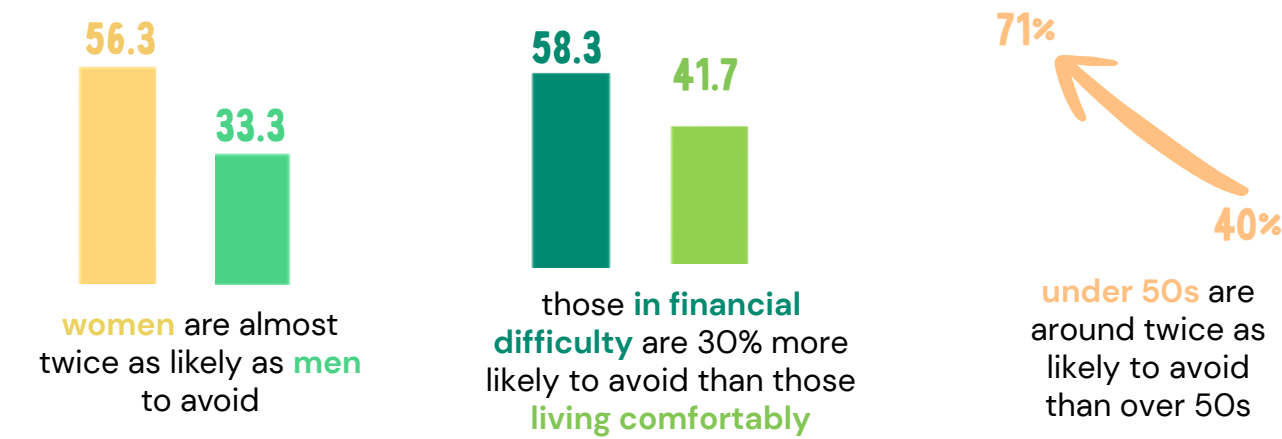
“Facilities do not meet my needs”

“Paths or layout are too difficult to navigate”

Avoiding Green Spaces
The survey asked if visitors avoided their main park at certain times of the day or week. Almost half (48.5%) of respondents avoided their green space at certain times. This is often linked to feelings of being unsafe, unwelcome, or unaccommodated within the space.



Several demographic groups were identified as being significantly more likely to avoid their park at certain times:



Some other groups were also slightly more likely than average to report some level of avoidance, though this was less pronounced:

- Religion:** being Muslim or Hindu
- Ethnicity:** identifying as Mixed Ethnicity
- Health:** being in “poor” or “very poor” health
- Ability:** reporting being disabled

We asked respondents why and when they avoid any part of their main park. Both after dark and busy periods were avoided, often due to poorer perceived safety and comfort. In line with the statistical findings, many reported feeling less safe as a woman or with their children after dark. At busy times such as during Parkrun or when the playground is full, lack of space became an issue. Some men reported that they felt others may be wary of them as a lone visitor during periods dominated by families, such as weekend mornings, which deterred their visits. Busy times also cause accessibility challenges such as lack of parking or busy traffic making it hard to reach green spaces on foot.

AFTER DARK	safety concerns, poor lighting, fear of crime <i>“On a night as there are no lights and can be pitch black in some places. Not safe for women or children”</i>
BUSY TIMES	overcrowded, space “not for me”, rush hour traffic, parking, noise <i>“rush hour – hard to cross road”</i> <i>“near playground and Parkrun... very busy and noisy”</i>
SAFETY	ASB, loitering youths, swearing, motor vehicles, drugs, vandalism, maintenance, cleanliness <i>“it doesn't always feel safe because people speed along pedestrian paths on mopeds and e-bikes”</i>

More broadly, the actions of others in green spaces affected feelings of safety. Antisocial behaviour, particularly people vandalising property, swearing, and riding e-bikes or motorised vehicles within the space were frequent concerns. Some stated that this especially deterred them from visiting with children, as they didn't want their children exposed to certain language or safety issues.

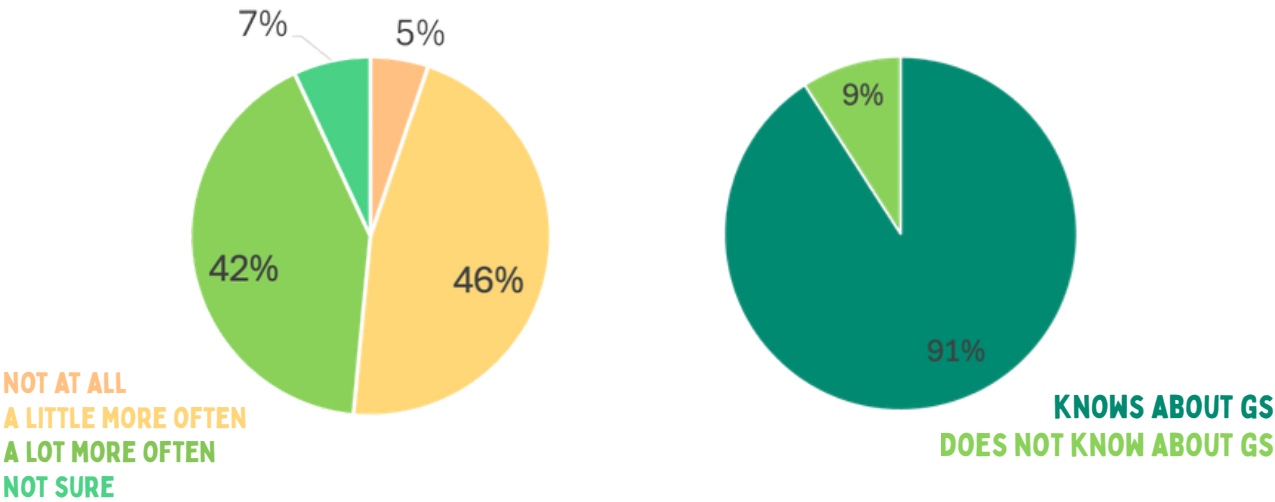
4D. INFREQUENT VISITORS

What do Infrequent Visitors Have in Common?

Sixteen percent of respondents were infrequent users, meaning they visited Leeds' green spaces less than once a month.

Most infrequent users still visited green spaces in Leeds around 2–3 times a year; just 1.5% never visited.

The vast majority (91%) said they knew about the green spaces available responding positively to the question, "Do you feel have enough information about where your nearest parks are to where you live?". Almost as many (88%) would like to visit more often, with 42% wanting to visit "a lot more often" and 46% wanting to visit a little more often. A small minority, just 5%, did not want to visit more often.



Who Visits Less Frequently?

While comparable across gender and age groups, people visiting green spaces less than once a month were over twice as likely to be of South Asian ethnicity than average, which may overlap with reported religions of Hinduism and Islam being much more common among this group.

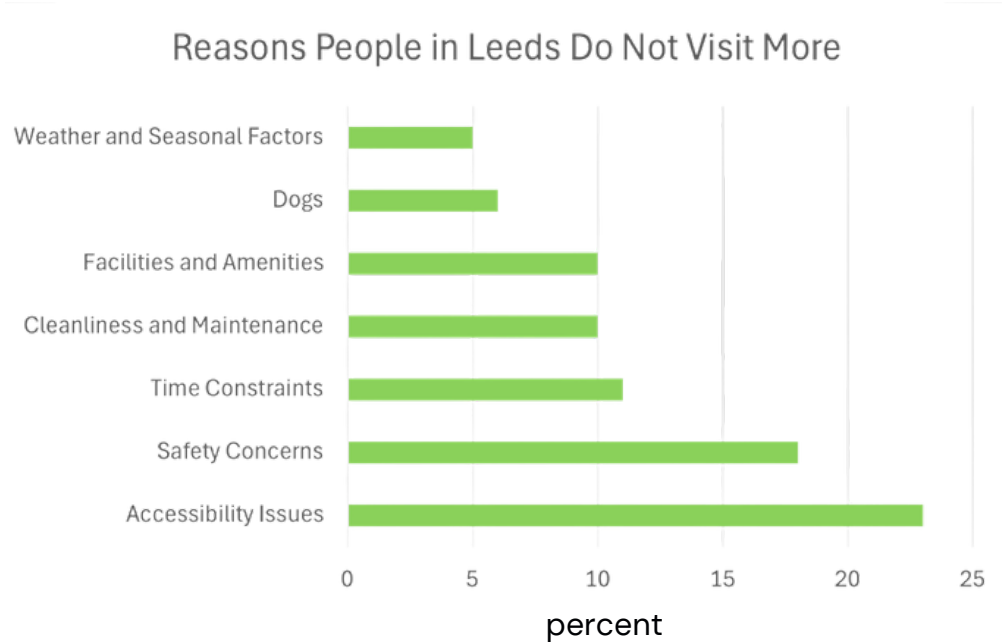
Almost half (47.85) of people in 'Very Poor' health visited green spaces infrequently, compared to just 8% of those in 'Very Good' health, and disabled people being around twice as likely to be infrequent visitors as non-disabled people.

Visiting less frequently was also associated with a number of poorer economic factors, including living in a more deprived area or being in financial difficulty, while economically inactive people (20.5%) were nearly twice as likely as employed people (11.8%) to visit infrequently. This may be due to an overlap between physical health/disability and economic struggles, compounding the ability to visit more frequently for those in this intersectional group.



Why do Infrequent Users Not Visit More Often?

Infrequent users were asked to specify the main reason they did not use green spaces more often. Several themes were identified, the most prevalent of which were accessibility and safety concerns, implying that infrequent users did not feel comfortable or able to use the spaces. This aligns with the statistics showing that those in poorer health or with a disability were much more likely than average to be an infrequent user.



1. Accessibility Issues

- Physical challenges for disabled individuals and those with mobility problems.
- Green spaces not disability-friendly for children.
- Difficulties with transport and distance from home.

2. Safety Concerns

Fear of anti-social behaviour, gangs, drug use, and vandalism.
Feeling unsafe alone, especially for women and parents with children.
Poor lighting and lack of security measures.

3. Time Constraints

Work commitments, caring responsibilities, and busy schedules.
Limited free time to visit parks.



4. Cleanliness and Maintenance

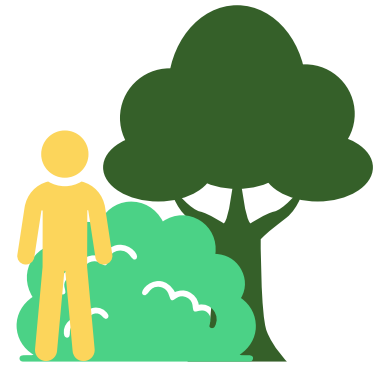
Litter, dog fouling, graffiti, and broken equipment.
Green spaces described as neglected, unkempt, and in need of revamp.

5. Lack of Facilities and Activities

Few amenities like toilets, cafés, or seating.
Limited play areas and things to do for different age groups.
No sports facilities (e.g. netball).

6. Dogs

Dogs off leash and behaving aggressively
Lack of space to exercise dogs freely
Dog fouling



7. Weather and Seasonal Factors

Cold, dark evenings and British weather discourage visits.
Preference for indoor alternatives like gyms during bad weather.

4E. PRIORITIES FOR THE FUTURE OF GREEN SPACES

Respondents were asked to select up to 3 key priorities for green spaces in their neighbourhood of Leeds. There was considerable overlap with the barriers people said they faced. Many people had reported that events were a barrier, and 18.7% recommended that they'd like to see more events and activities for their local community.

Green spaces being kept clean and maintained (e.g. free of litter, weeds, dog poo) was the top priority, selected by over half of respondents (53.3%). Specific facilities, such as children's activities (e.g. play parks, 16.4%), sports facilities (8.4%), and places to buy food and drink (12.4%) were also important.

Other practical priorities were larger green spaces (13.8%), accessible car parking (9.1%), and better accessibility within the spaces, including level pathways, wider gates, stair rails, and seating (13.3%). Nature and wildlife were very important (notably the second top priority at 31.2%), and just over 10% (10.7) felt that climate friendliness was crucial.

Markedly, personal safety was a priority for almost 1 in 4 (18.5%), while other aspects of safety such as better dog control (24.9%) were one of the most common responses. Further social factors included supporting more people of different cultures and backgrounds to use parks (6.9%) and providing more online information (6.9%), such as park maps, events, and facilities.

#1 KEEP PARKS CLEAN AND MAINTAINED



#2 MORE NATURE AND WILDLIFE



#3 BETTER DOG CONTROL



#4 BETTER PERSONAL SAFETY



#5 MORE CHILDREN'S ACTIVITIES



Priorities also differed for different people. Disabled people and those in poorer health were more likely than average to prioritise personal safety, while those in poorer health and women prioritised larger green spaces. Women also prioritised children's activities more highly, as did younger and middle-aged adults, and those more financially comfortable. Those struggling financially were more likely to prioritise physical accessibility. We also asked respondents to justify why they had chosen these priorities:

“Better personal safety - There are no streetlights, so it is pitch black at night. There could at least be some lights there. More events/activities - I don't know of any activities that go on there. I think a park run or some little farmers market event”

“I just love wildlife, nature and water together. However, less litter and dog poo bags would help and somewhere to get a coffee to sit and enjoy the view”

“If parks feel looked after they feel like safe places to be. Encouraging wildlife shows a commitment to tackling the climate crisis. Encouraging people of all ages to use parks is good for community cohesion.”

“Staffing makes people feel safe. Toilets make it accessible for all, very young, old and with medical needs”

THE PARKS ACCESSIBILITY INDEX

We have developed the Parks Accessibility Index for Leeds as a practical tool to help understand how accessible parks are to the residents who use them. The Index is calculated based on our green space Accessibility questions (see [Section 3d](#)) and barriers to use (see [Section 4c](#)) and provides a score for each of the 'main parks' in Leeds. There is a total Index score, out of 6, as well as scores for each of the As. The Index can be used to identify strengths and weaknesses for each park, to inform planning and service improvement.

The index, user guide, and technical support, are available at:
<https://doi.org/10.48785/100/488>

The 6 As of Accessibility [1]:

**- AVAILABILITY – ACCESSIBILITY – ACCOMMODATION – AFFORDABILITY –
ACCEPTABILITY - AWARENESS -**

[1] Gray, J., Houlden, V., and Barker, A., 2025. Beyond Proximity: a conceptual framework and rapid evidence review of barriers and inequities in urban greenspace access. [Preprint]. SocArXiv. Available at: https://doi.org/10.31235/osf.io/cmt46_v1



4F. SUMMARY OF FINDINGS FOR DIFFERENT GREEN SPACE EXPERIENCES IN LEEDS

- Findings reveal different experiences of Leeds green spaces for certain social groups:
- South Asian people may stay longer but rate their green spaces in poorer condition.
- Disabled people and those in poorer health are the group most likely to avoid or never visit green spaces in Leeds. They tend to rate their green spaces as poorer condition, potentially due to accessibility, facility, and safety barriers
- Younger adults often rate their green spaces in poorer condition and face time constraints to visiting, making them more likely to visiting infrequently. Under 40s prioritise activities for children.
- Women visit more often than men and tend to rate their green spaces in better condition. However, they also are more susceptible to facing accessibility and safety concerns, leading them to avoid visiting at certain times. They also prioritise activities for children.
- Economically, those who report financial struggles are more likely to avoid parks than wealthier people, and prioritise physical accessibility. There is overlap between this group and those in poorer health.
- Infrequent visitors would usually like to visit 'a little' or 'a lot' more often, but identified barriers around their own safety and time available, as well as physical features of their local green spaces, such as cleanliness, maintenance, facilities, and accessibility.

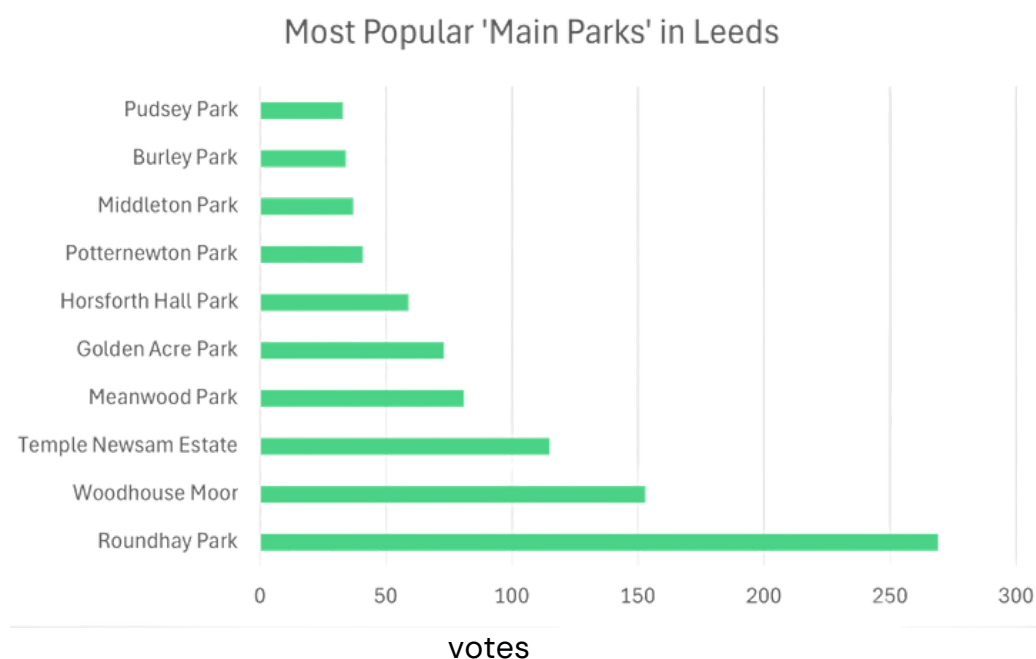


5. PARK PROFILES: WHAT MAKES A GREAT GREEN SPACE IN LEEDS?

To gain a deeper understanding of what works, and where there is most scope for improvement, across Leeds' green spaces, we explored commonalities across the most popular 'main' parks, as well as those with the highest and lowest subjective satisfaction ratings. These insights are based on a combination of scores provided by frequent green space visitors and objective data on the characteristics of each space.

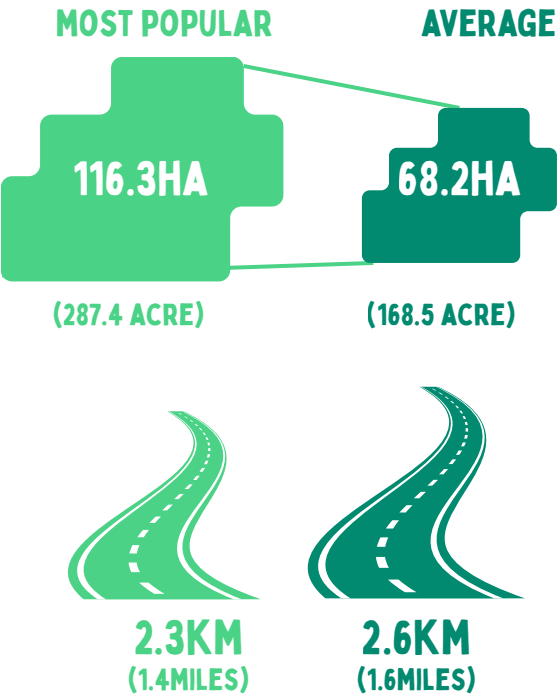
5A. MOST POPULAR GREEN SPACES IN LEEDS

The ten green spaces most commonly identified as a 'main park' (most visited green space) are shown below, each identified at least 30 times in the data. The most mentioned park was Roundhay Park in the North of Leeds, with a huge 269 votes, equal to 20.3% of frequent users. There was a considerable drop in mentions for the next most popular spaces, of Woodhouse Moor (153, 11.6%), a green area close to the University of Leeds, which attracts many students and commuters into the city. Temple Newsam was the only other space to receive over 100 mentions (114, 8.7%), a large, destination Country Park to the East of Leeds itself. Meanwood Park and Golden Acre Park make up the final two green spaces in the 5 most popular, with 81 (6.1%) and 73 (5.3%) of mentions respectively. With Golden Acre Park being located six miles North of Leeds, while Meanwood is more central for residents of the Headingley and Meanwood areas of Leeds city. This shows a diversity of locations for the most popular green spaces within Leeds. The remaining most popular green spaces were identified between 33 and 59 times (2.5–4.5%).



Each of the five highest-used green spaces are notable for their wealth of facilities and landscaping, as well as heritage features; three are recognised with Green Flag Award status (Roundhay Park, Golden Acre Park, and Temple Newsam Estate) and the other two have passed (the local equivalent) Leeds Quality Park standard. All 5 parks have walking routes to explore a mix of planting, trees, open green areas, and nature areas.

Four of the five also feature cafés (excluding Woodhouse Moor), children’s play equipment and sports facilities (excluding Golden Acre Park), and water features, including lakes/ponds (Roundhay Park, Temple Newsam Estate, Golden Acre Park) and streams/rivers (Roundhay Park, Golden Acre Park, Meanwood Park).

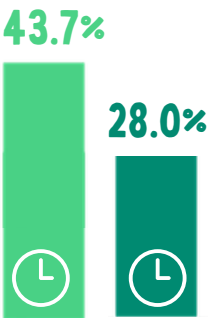


Among all 10 ‘most popular’ green spaces, the average space is around twice the size of the average ‘main park’ identified across Leeds, with two of the top 5 being larger than average (Roundhay and Temple Newsam).

We calculated the travel distance along the street network between each frequent visitor’s post code and the nearest access point to their main park. The most popular green spaces required a slightly shorter average trip of 2.3km (1.4 miles) compared to 2.6km (1.6 miles) across the whole sample.

Visitors to the most popular green spaces were more likely to visit for an hour or more, with 43.7% spending 1–2 hours there, compared to the Leeds average of just 28%, reinforcing their status as destination parks.

Combined, these factors suggest strong ‘pull factors’, including size and facilities, which encourage more visits and those from further afield.

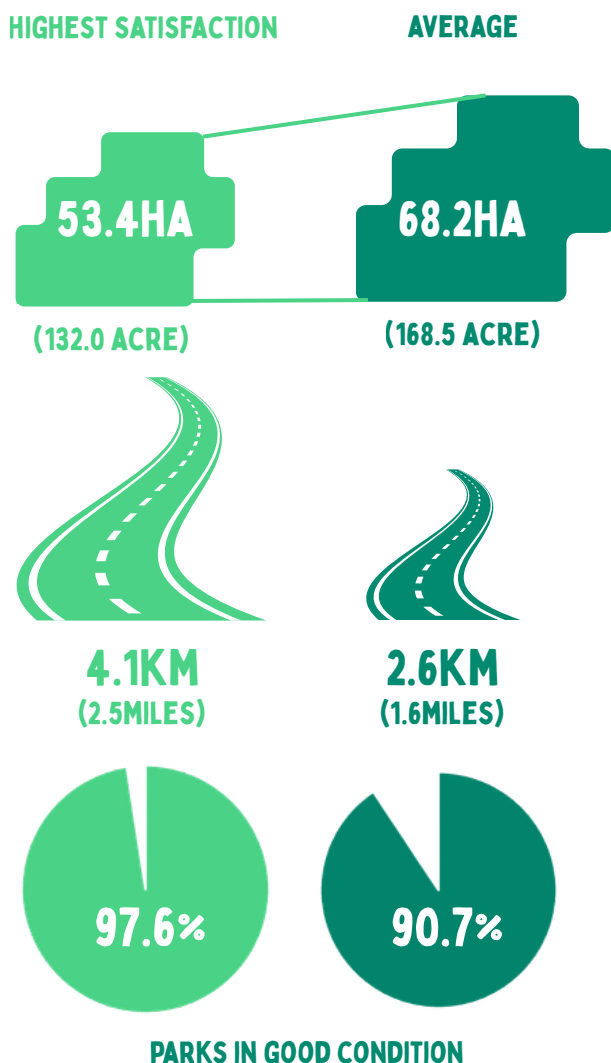


5B. MOST SATISFACTORY GREEN SPACES IN LEEDS

Over 80% of respondents in Leeds reported being satisfied with their most-used green space. To identify the highest-rated sites, we calculated the share of people who agreed or strongly agreed with the statement: “Overall, I am satisfied with my park.” To ensure results were reliable, we only included green spaces named at least 10 times as a “most-used” park. These were then ranked by satisfaction levels, with the top five identified as the most satisfactory green spaces in Leeds.



There was no overlap between the 5 most used and most highly-rated green spaces, and, surprisingly, none of the highest-rated parks appeared among the top 10 for popularity. This suggests that the factors drawing people to the most-used green spaces may be different to those providing the greatest satisfaction.



The data confirms this. The highest-rated green spaces were around 20%, or 15 hectares smaller than the average (53.4 hectares compared to 68.2 hectares), as shown, with 4 of the 5 highest-rated parks considerably smaller than average; though the extensive size of Temple Newsam estate, at over 338ha, does influence the average.

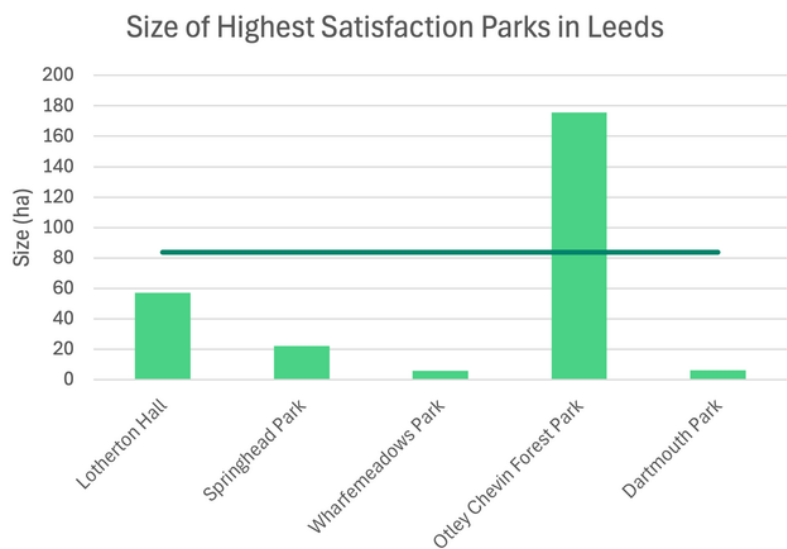
Visitors also travelled around one and a half times further to the highest-rated parks, averaging 4.2 kilometres compared to the local average of 2.6 kilometres. Visitors were also more likely to spend an hour or more in the highest-rated green spaces, with 76.7% spending between 30 minutes and 2 hours per visit, compared to 65.2% across Leeds; just 15% visited for under 30 minutes, compared to 26.9% on average.



As expected, perceptions of quality were also higher for these spaces. While an average of 90.7% of respondents said their most-used green space was in good condition, this rose to 97.6% for the highest-rated parks.

All these green spaces are located on the outskirts of the city of Leeds. Despite being generally smaller, this suggests they are valued and meet the needs of their local communities. However, they also share features which attract visitors from further afield as ‘destination parks’, which may account for residents travelling further to spend time in these spaces.

Each includes a picnic space, walking routes, and a mix of landscapes, such as grass, trees, and wilder nature areas; 4 also have children’s play areas (excluding Otley Chevin Forest) and water features (excluding Dartmouth Park). Dartmouth, Springhead, and Wharfemeadows also have cafés and sports facilities such as tennis courts, sports pitches, MUGAs, or skate parks.



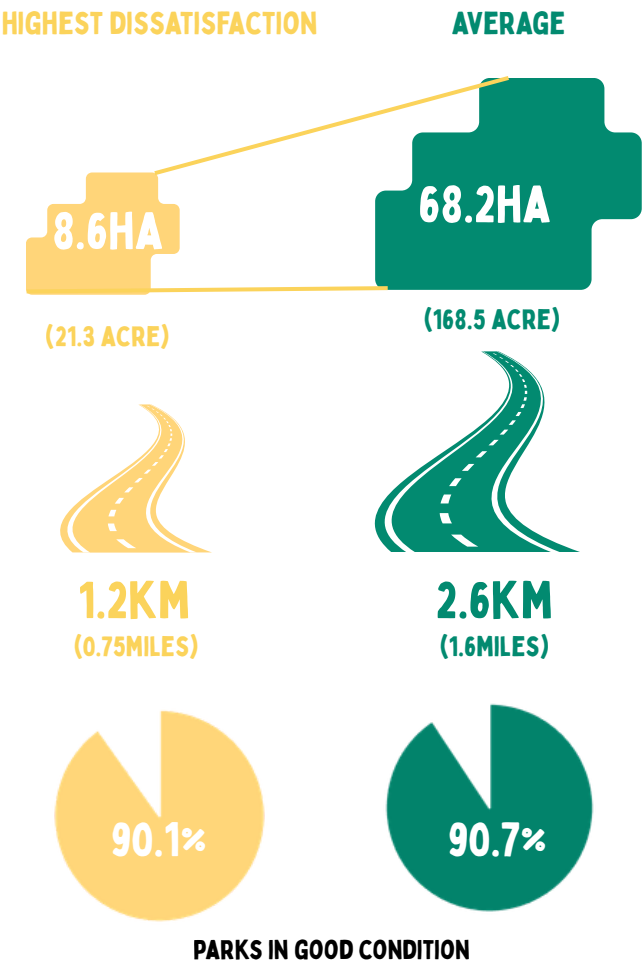
5C. HOW CAN WE IMPROVE SATISFACTION IN LEEDS?

At the other end of the scale were the green spaces with the highest levels of dissatisfaction. To ensure reliable results, we again included only spaces named at least 10 times as a ‘main park’. We calculated the proportion of respondents who ‘disagreed’ or ‘strongly disagreed’ that they were satisfied and examined the five lowest-rated green spaces. For these parks, an average of 23% of respondents expressed dissatisfaction (ranging from 15 to 36%), compared to an average of 8% for all parks. As such, only a relatively small minority of respondents were dissatisfied, yet it is worth exploring where improvements could be made.

These spaces shared some positive features. They were closer to homes (around half of the average distance) and score above average for being “within easy walking or wheeling distance” (see [Section 3d](#)). This suggests convenience supports their usability, as they may be/have:



The condition of these spaces was perceived positively and comparably to the local average, with 90.1% of respondents agreeing they were in good condition. Together, these factors imply that, generally, these spaces are perceived positively and have much to offer, often being Accessible and Affordable to local residents.



The lowest-rated parks were smaller than average, at around 8.6 hectares, and attracted shorter visits, with over a third of visitors (37.8%) spending less than 30 minutes there, compared to a quarter on average. Four out of 5 of the parks were located in areas of Leeds with higher levels of deprivation than average. We then examined our other Access indicators to better understand lower satisfaction. Compared with the Leeds average, these spaces scored lower on how well they met people’s needs in terms of “Availability” and “Acceptability”



THE LEAST SATISFACTORY PARKS ARE LESS LIKELY TO...

BE BIG ENOUGH

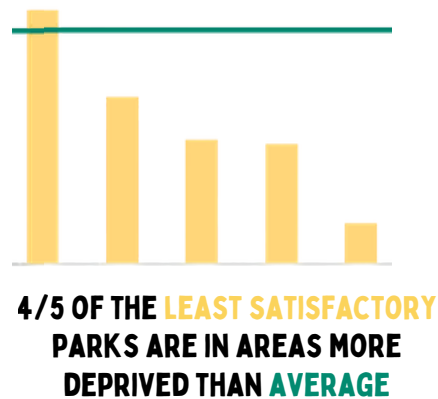
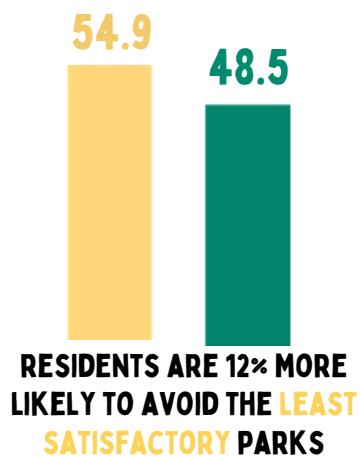
BE CLEAN AND MAINTAINED

HAVE NATURE + WILDLIFE

FEEL SAFE + WELCOMING

HAVE FACILITIES THAT MEET VISITORS' NEEDS

In particular, these spaces were less likely to feel clean, safe, or welcoming than some other spaces, and were seen as offering fewer opportunities to experience nature and wildlife. They were also less likely to provide facilities that meet visitors' need. Reflecting this, people were significantly (10%) more likely to report avoiding these parks.



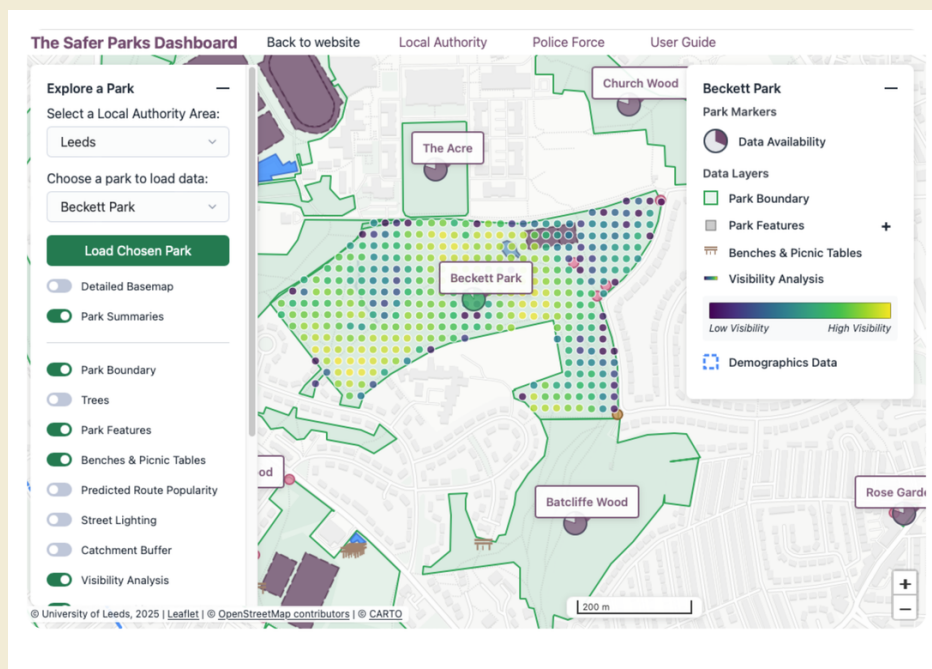
Overall, these findings suggest that these green spaces are valued local assets: they are perceived to be in good condition, convenient, and accessible for nearby residents. However, there is an opportunity to improve the range of facilities and affordable activities on offer within the spaces to meet local needs, alongside strengthening maintenance and cleanliness and maintenance to enhance perceptions of safety, inclusion, and overall satisfaction.



The Safer Parks Dashboard

This research has informed the development of the Safer Parks Dashboard. This new interactive tool, co-designed by the University of Leeds, uses open spatial data to help increase accessibility and inclusion in parks, particularly for women and girls. Originally developed as a case study in West Yorkshire, the dashboard is now extending across the country, to support implementation of the Safer Parks Guidance. It brings together information on:

- Visibility across the park
- Predicted route popularity
- Park features (entrances, benches, facilities)
- Trees
- Park catchment population demographics (15 min walk)
- Lighting



It can be combined with the survey findings on experiences using Leeds' parks and the Parks Accessibility Index. It can be used by local authorities, police, and community groups to visualise safety-related features, highlight quick-win improvements, and suggest priorities for investment.

THE DASHBOARD IS AVAILABLE AT: [HTTPS://SAFER-PARKS.GITHUB.IO/](https://safer-parks.github.io/)

5D. SUMMARY OF WHAT MAKES A GREAT GREEN SPACE IN LEEDS

- Residents travel further to visit the highest-rated and their most-used parks. These spaces tend to be larger and attract considerably longer visits, potentially due to their quality and wealth of facilities available, making them appeal as 'destination parks'.
- The most satisfactory green spaces were often smaller than average but perceived to be in very good condition, often located on the outskirts of the city. Their facilities, diversity of landscapes, and abundance of nature may hold both community value and attraction as a destination park.
- Residents may visit local parks they are less satisfied with due to convenience (size, proximity, physical accessibility, and events). The lowest-rated parks tend to be in more deprived areas, and the size, amount of nature, and upkeep of the park may limit satisfaction.



6. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR GREEN SPACES IN LEEDS

6A. SUMMARY AND CONTEXT

The findings of the Leeds Access to Parks and Green Spaces Survey 2025 reveal huge appreciation for Leeds' green spaces, with 80% of the 18,77 respondents stating that they are satisfied with their most used park, and 91% rating their park to be in favourable condition. Nearly three quarters visit at least once a week. Of the minority (16%) who visit parks infrequently (less than once per month), almost 90% would like to visit more often.

The results also reveal differences of experience for the diverse residents of Leeds, especially along gender, age, economic, and (dis)ability lines. Concerns about safety after dark, a lack of public toilets, fear of crime, cleanliness, and feeling unwelcome are the main barriers which prevent people visiting more often, and highlight key areas that could be addressed to increase accessibility and reduce avoidance.

The Leeds research ran in tandem to the Bradford Access to Parks and Green Spaces Survey, which revealed similar findings, especially around the challenges facing green space provision and users in the local area. Findings from the Bradford survey are reported separately, in order to target statistics and recommendations more locally.

It is important to note that the findings across both cities do not exist in isolation, and many of the challenges, especially around safety after dark, dog management, and access to toilets, reflect national obstacles in providing accessible public spaces that cater to all.

As such, we hope that the statistical findings, insights into individual experiences, and recommendations for Leeds green spaces can be applied beyond the local area. These findings may be used and adapted to help parks and green spaces in different local authorities nationally be made as welcoming, safe, and accessible as possible.

Based upon these findings, we now present key themes and strategic recommendations to develop green space planning, policy, and practice in Leeds, prioritising access for all.

Based on our research, we identified several **key themes** for supporting the accessibility and frequency of use of parks and green spaces in Leeds, especially for those reporting higher barriers or avoidance, including women, disabled people, younger adults, those in financial difficulty or living in more deprived areas. While these themes are based on the data collected in Leeds many of these reflect national challenges in parks accessibility:

- Keep parks clean and well-maintained.
- Tackle antisocial-behaviour, especially in the evening, including presence of motorised vehicles (i.e. mopeds, quadbikes) and dogs off-leash.
- Remove barriers to physical access such as poor paths, lack of benches and narrow entrances that exclude wheelchairs, focussing on the needs of disabled people, older people, and families.
- Ensure parks have engaging and well-maintained facilities and activities for children and young people.
- Facilitate access to toilets.
- Enhance opportunities for nature and wildlife to flourish.
- Manage activities and design facilities in the park (especially playgrounds) so there's room for everyone.
- Undertake further research to identify what the specific barriers are for the following groups: South Asian people, those struggling financially, and less healthy or disabled residents.

6B. WICKED PROBLEMS

Several 'wicked problems' were identified through survey responses and discussions. While widely reported by respondents, these issues are challenging to tackle, as confirmed in our workshop with the Council:

- Providing and maintaining accessible public toilets. While Councils support this principle, public toilets are very expensive to maintain and tend to attract anti-social behaviour.
- Managing dogs, dog mess, and encouraging responsible ownership. One of the most popular activities in green spaces is dog walking, but at the same time, fear of dogs of leash can put others off visiting parks altogether, especially older people. It is difficult for park managers to balance the needs of both groups and manage irresponsible dog owners with limited resources.
- Ensuring entrances are accessible for people using disability scooters, wheelchairs and prams while stopping dangerous and illegal off-road vehicles such as motorbikes and quad bikes accessing sites.
- Providing lighting to improve access to parks after dark within budget and without compromising nocturnal wildlife.

WICKED PROBLEMS IN LEEDS' GREEN SPACES



With these in mind, we make the following recommendations for developing parks and green spaces policy and practice in Leeds and similar cities in line with the **United Nation's Sustainable Development Goal 11.7** which requires that all nation states will 'by 2030 provide universal access to safe, inclusive and accessible, green and public spaces, in particular for women and children, older persons and persons with disabilities'. Allied to this, we have created a Park Accessibility Index for Leeds, to help identify targeted quick wins and longer-term actions specific to each park.

6C. STRATEGIC RECOMMENDATIONS FOR LEEDS

PRIORITY 1: EXTEND A STRATEGIC, EVIDENCE-LED APPROACH

1. Ensure accessibility remains a core strategic priority

Continue to embed accessibility and inclusion at the heart of Leeds' Parks and Green Spaces Strategy, recognising the role of parks in health and wellbeing.

2. Target investment using data and evidence

Use tools such as the Park Accessibility Index, the Safer Parks Dashboard, and public consultations to prioritise access improvements, particularly in deprived areas and parks with lower satisfaction.

3. Address inequalities in park experience

Set clear goals for reducing disparities in quality, safety, and inclusion across different communities and user groups.

4. Strengthen cross-council and cross-sectoral working

Improve coordination between departments, as well as other sectors including educational, third, private, and voluntary sectors, to address access, facilities, and programming more holistically.

PRIORITY 2: IMPROVE ACCESSIBILITY AND INCLUSION

1. Undertake a city-wide accessibility audit

Review physical access, transport, facilities, and inclusive design across all parks, with particular focus on disabled users, women, ethnic minorities, parents with children, and older people.

2. Develop an inclusive access action plan

Build on audit findings to deliver practical improvements, including accessible entrances, paths, seating, toilets, and play provision.

3. Better understand barriers to use

Engage with underserved groups (e.g. disabled people, infrequent users, ethnic minorities) to identify and address personal and social barriers.

4. Consider transport and parking

Reflect different travel needs in planning, including accessible parking, public transport links, and safe walking and cycling routes.

PRIORITY 3: IMPROVE SAFETY AND PERCEPTIONS OF SAFETY

1. Address safety and perceptions of safety

Use the Safer Parks guidance to improve design and management of parks, particularly for women, families, and vulnerable users.

2. Create welcoming and inclusive environments

Improve entrances, signage, and park design to ensure all users feel welcome and able to navigate spaces easily.

3. Early-evening lighting*

In conversations with communities, consider commuter-time lighting of main paths and active travel routes in winter to improve safety and usability in the early evenings.

4. Implement dog control

Review dog control, including both dog on-lead zones and secure dog off-lead areas, alongside emphasising community responsibility, to improve safety and comfort of all park users.

***A note on lighting:** Lighting should be applied selectively and strategically. Decisions should balance likely use, safety needs, active travel, and ecological impacts. Lower-level, evenly distributed lighting can improve comfort and visibility while avoiding excessive brightness, glare, and deep shadows.



PRIORITY 4: PROVIDE A RANGE OF GOOD QUALITY FACILITIES

1. Increase and diversify facilities

Invest in play areas, youth spaces, sports facilities, and outdoor gyms to meet a wider range of needs specific to local communities, through co-design. Consider multiple or pop-up play spaces in high-demand areas to reduce crowding.

2. Expand access to toilets

Explore partnerships (e.g. with local businesses and community buildings) to increase availability of accessible public toilets near parks where it is not possible to install them in the park.

3. Improve park entrances

Explore options to provide open, permeable park entrances to support accessibility, inclusion, and everyday use, balancing safety with equitable access. Restrictive barriers to deter misuse (e.g. off-road vehicle access) may exclude legitimate uses, such as mobility aids and active travel. Holistic, community approaches such as policing and management should be prioritised to tackle antisocial behaviour.

4. Enhance provision for nature and wildlife

Create wilder areas, natural water features, and low-mow zones, while preserving open grassed areas for sports and picnics.

PRIORITY 5: STRENGTHEN COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND USE

1. Work with local communities and partners

Collaborate with Friends groups, community organisations, and local residents to co-design improvements and activities.

2. Increase affordable and inclusive activities

Support events and programming that reflect local needs and encourage wider use.

3. Improve communication and promotion

Use a mix of channels (including non-digital) and community networks to ensure all groups are aware of opportunities.

APPENDIX A: THE LEEDS ACCESS TO PARKS AND GREEN SPACES SURVEY QUESTIONNAIRE

Leeds Access to Parks and Green Spaces Survey

Guidance: Questions marked * are compulsory

Section I: Introduction

1. What is your post code? (e.g. LS1 1BA) *

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2. In the past 12 months, how often on average have you used parks in Leeds? *

By 'parks', we mean a public park or other green space where there is grass, trees, flowers, or other vegetation. This does not include your own garden.

By 'used', we mean visited as a destination or passed through on the way to another place.

Every day		Please go to section A
More than twice a week, but not every day		
Twice a week		
Once a week		
Once or twice a month		
Once every 2-3 months		Please go to section B
Less often		
Never		

Section A: YOUR PARK OR GREEN SPACE

3. What is the name of the park you use most often? From now on, we will refer to this as **YOUR PARK**.*

If you don't know the name of the park, please write the name of the road it is on.

Name of park or the road it is on

4a. Is **YOUR PARK** the park nearest to your home?

Yes, I use the park nearest to my home most often – go to Question 5	
No, the park I use most often is not the one nearest to my home – go to Question 4b	

4b. Why do use **YOUR PARK** more often, rather than others that are nearer your home?

Comments

5. How much do you agree or disagree with the following statements about **YOUR PARK**?

Need	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
My park is big enough					
My park is within easy walking or wheeling distance					
Roads are safe for walking, running, or wheeling to my park					
The paths and layout of my park make it easy to get around					
My park has nature and wildlife that appeal to me					
My park has facilities that meet most of my needs (e.g. car parks, playgrounds, benches, toilets)					
There are events in my park that appeal to me					
Activities and events in my park are affordable					
My park is clean and well-maintained					
My park feels safe during the daytime					
My park feels safe after dark					
My park feels welcoming					
Overall, I am satisfied with my park					

6. How often do you usually use **YOUR PARK**?

Autumn/Winter (when the weather is generally colder/wetter)	Every Day	More than twice a week, but not every day	Twice a week	Once a week	Once every two weeks	Once a month	Less often
Spring/Summer (when the weather is generally good)	Every Day	More than twice a week, but not every day	Twice a week	Once a week	Once every two weeks	Once a month	Less often

7. How long do you usually stay at **YOUR PARK**?

Less than 15 minutes	15- 30 minutes	30 minutes- 1 hour	1-2 hours	2-3 hours	More than 3 hours

8a. Are there any times of the day or week in which you AVOID using any part of **YOUR PARK**?

No – go to Question 9	
Don't know – go to Question 9	
Yes – go to Question 8b	

8b. Please tell us more about why and when you avoid any part of **YOUR PARK**:

Comments

9. What are your main reasons for using **YOUR PARK**? (please tick up to 5 answers)

Relax/escape		Enjoy nature (plants, animals, seasons)		Enjoy historical features	
Get fresh air		For a walk		Walk the dog	
Ride a bike		For a run		Go skateboarding	
Play sports/games		Watch sports/games		Attend a group exercise activity (e.g. Parkrun)	
Using outdoor gym		Family outing		Socialise	
Picnic		Barbecue		Have lunch	
Visit café/restaurant		Visit playground		Meet a community/social group	
Use allotments		Non-leisure activities (e.g. activism, volunteer)		Attend events	

Paid activities (funfair, market, music)		As a route/shortcut from one place to another	
Other (please write)			

10. How do you rate the current condition of **YOUR PARK?**

Very good		Good		Acceptable		Poor		Very poor	
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11. If you could improve one thing about **YOUR PARK, what would it be?**

Comments

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→ Please go to Section C (don't complete Section B)

Section B: Your Park Use

12. Would you like to use parks more often?

Not at all		A little		Definitely		Not sure	
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13. What is the main reason you do not use parks more often?

Comments

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14. Do you have enough information about where your nearest parks are to where you live?

Yes, I know about the parks		I don't know where parks are	
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15. Where do you spend free time? (please tick all that apply)

High street shops		Cafes/restaurants		Friends' houses	
Places of worship		Board/video game places		The coast/rivers	
The cinema		The theatre		Music concerts	
Museums/galleries		Historic buildings		Pubs/bars/social clubs	
Night clubs		Group organisations		The library	
My garden		Community centres		Sports and leisure centres	
The countryside		The seaside		At home	

Other (please
specify)

Section C: Your Access to Parks

16. What challenges make it more difficult for you to use parks in Leeds?

Instruction: This question is about parks generally, not specifically your park.
Please tick all that apply.

Accessibility and Transportation					
Parks are too far away		Busy roads/traffic make it hard to get to parks		Paths or layouts are too difficult to use (e.g. steps, slopes, uneven surfaces)	
I don't have access to transport		Parks are difficult to find		I have nowhere to park my car	
Facilities and Maintenance					
Parks are too small		Parks are not clean or maintained enough		There aren't enough public toilets	
There aren't enough accessible toilets		Facilities do not meet my needs (e.g. car parks, playgrounds, benches)		There aren't enough facilities/activities for me	
Safety and Comfort					
Lighting is poor		I'm concerned about crime/antisocial behaviour		I don't feel safe during the day	
I don't feel safe after dark		I feel unwelcome because of my gender, ethnicity, religion, disability, or sexuality		I feel unsafe because of my gender, ethnicity, religion, disability, or sexuality	
I'm worried about getting lost		I'm afraid of becoming ill while visiting		I feel judged because of my appearance	
I'm concerned about harassment		There are too many dogs off-leash			
Social and Environmental Factors					
Parks are overcrowded		Parks feel empty or isolated		I don't see other people like me in parks	
Parks are too noisy					
Activities and Events					

Activities or events in the park don't interest me		Activities or events in the park are too expensive		There aren't activities I enjoy	
I don't know of any activities or events held in the park					
Personal Barriers					
I'm too busy with responsibilities at home or work		I have mental health challenges		I have physical health challenges	
I have sensory challenges (e.g. sensitivity to noise/crowds)		I don't have the right clothing for different weather conditions		I don't have anyone to go with	
I have caring responsibilities					

17. Do you have any other comments about things that prevent you using parks?

Comments

Section D: Your Priorities for Parks

18. What do you consider to be the key priorities for parks in your neighbourhood?
Please tick up to 3 answers.

More events/ activities for the local community		More or larger green spaces	
Improved physical accessibility (e.g. level pathways, wider gates, stair rails, seating)		More nature and wildlife	
Better personal safety (e.g. visibility, staffing, first aid)		More accessible parking near park entrances	
Activities for children and young people (e.g. play areas, skate ramps)		Support more people of different cultures and backgrounds to use parks	
Sports facilities (e.g. courts and pitches)		Keep parks clean and maintained (e.g. free of litter, weeds, dog poo)	
Online information (e.g. park maps, events, facilities)		Better dog control (e.g. fenced walking areas, leash policies)	
More opportunities to buy food and drink		Making spaces climate-friendly	
Other (please specify)			

19. Please tell us why you chose these priorities

Comments

Section E: Your Health and Wellbeing

20. How is your health in general?

Very good		Good		Fair		Bad		Very Bad	
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21. Below are some statements about feelings and thoughts. Please tick the box that best describes your experience of each over the last 2 weeks:

Statement	None of the time	Rarely	Some of the time	Often	All of the time
I've been feeling optimistic about the future					
I've been feeling useful					
I've been feeling relaxed					
I've been dealing with problems well					
I've been thinking clearly					
I've been feeling close to other people					
I've been able to make up my own mind about things					

22a. Do you have any physical or mental health conditions or illnesses lasting or expected to last 12 months or more

Yes – go to 22b	
No – go to Section F	

22b. Do any of your conditions or illnesses reduce your ability to carry out day-to-day activities?

Yes, a lot	
Yes, a little	
Not at all	

Section F: About You

We will now ask for information about you. Your responses will remain confidential and will be anonymised to protect your identity. This information will help us understand the needs and experiences of different people for accessing parks. It helps to ensure that our findings reflect diverse perspectives.

23. What is your age?

18-24		25-34		35-49		50-64		Over 65	
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24. What is your sex?

Male	
Female	

25. Is the gender you identify with the same as your sex?

Yes	
No (please write gender identity)	

26. Which of the following best describes your sexual orientation?

Straight/heterosexual	
Gay or lesbian	
Bisexual	
Other (please write)	

27. What is your ethnic group?

WHITE			
English, Welsh, Scottish, Northern Irish or British		Irish	
Gypsy or Irish Traveller		Roma	
Any other White background (please write)			

ASIAN OR ASIAN BRITISH			
Indian		Pakistani	
Bangladeshi		Chinese	
Any other Asian Background (please write)			

MIXED OR MULTIPLE ETHNIC GROUPS			
White and Black Caribbean		White and Black African	
White and Asian			
Any other Mixed background (please write)			

BLACK, BLACK BRITISH, CARIBBEAN, OR AFRICAN			
Caribbean		African	
Other black background (please write)			

OTHER ETHNIC GROUP		
Arab	Any other ethnic group (please write)	

28. What is your religion? I am...

Of no Religion		Christian		Buddhist	
Hindu		Jewish		Muslim	
Sikh		Any other religion (please specify)			

29. In the last week, were you employed?

Yes	
No, but I was looking for work	
No, I'm a student	
No, I'm retired	
No, other	

30. How well are you and your household managing financially?

In Financial Difficulty		Struggling		Getting by		Doing Ok		Living comfortably	
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31. Do you have access to a garden?

Yes – a private garden	
Yes – a shared garden	
No	

END OF SURVEY