



# **S&SR Environment and Spaces Group Report:** COVID-19 Green and Open Space Use in Autumn 2020

**March 2021**

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on behalf of the S&SR Environment and Spaces Group.

Places & Health Programme (Funding codes: MC\_UU\_00022/4; SPHSU10),  
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## **Introduction**

The Social Systems Recovery (SSR) - Environments and Spaces Group is hosted by Public Health Scotland (PHS) and brings together partners from national and local government, the NHS, the third sector and academia. This document is for Government, Local Authorities, the NHS, the third sector and other professionals involved in environment and planning policy implementation at a national and local level and service providers in both the public and private sector. It covers:

- How COVID-19 continues to influence use of green and open space, including variation by age, sex, socio-economic status and ethnicity.
- The reported benefit of green and open space for mental and physical health following the first COVID-19 lockdown and ongoing restrictions.
- Recommendation for actions to support future decision making.

This is the second report produced by the group and describes the green and open space use in the Autumn 2020. The behaviours and patterns experienced here may be mirrored throughout 2021 as populations in Scotland, the UK and worldwide continue to live with COVID-19.

## **Main findings**

- 1) During November 2020, nearly two thirds of adults (63%) reported that they had visited a green or open space in the previous 4 weeks. This was an increase from May 2020, during national lockdown restrictions, when 48% reported visiting a greenspace in the previous 4 weeks.
- 2) There were sharp inequalities in visiting green and open space; 71% of those classed as high socio-economic status visited in the previous 4 weeks compared to just 53% of those of low socio-economic status. For those who reported use of green and open space:
  - I) 81% visited a green or open space on one or more occasions in the previous week. The frequency of visits varied considerably by individual demographic group; Older individuals (55+) visited green and open space most frequently. Those aged 18 to 24 years, females and BAME individuals visited green and open space less frequently.
  - II) 9 in 10 individuals agreed that being in green and open spaces benefitted their mental health.
- 6) For those who did not visit green or open spaces, poor weather was the most frequently reported reason.
- 7) Using outside space at home or being too busy were also frequently reported reasons for not visiting green and open spaces. Females and older individuals were most likely to report using outside space at their own home as a reason for not using other spaces.
- 8) Data from mobile phone tracking (Google) can give us a population level picture of park visits. There was a considerable increase following lifting of national lockdown restrictions in May 2020. Visits remained high during the summer months but reduced when restrictions returned in October 2020.
- 9) Early data from Google shows further marked reductions in park use following the second Scottish mainland lockdown, introduced on 5th January.

## ***Policy recommendations***

### **We recommend that Scottish Government, Local Authorities, the NHS and the third sector:**

- 1) Ensure the physical and fiscal protection of green and open spaces in Scotland. There was a marked increase in use of green and open spaces following the initial 2020 lockdown period, highlighting the importance of these spaces for population health and wellbeing.
- 2) Recognise that increase in use was not equal; socio-economic inequality remains. Action is needed to redress the underlying socio-economic inequality in access to, and use of, public and private open space.
- 3) Recognise many people access green spaces at home, particularly older people. This highlights the ongoing need to ensure housing offers access to green space / gardens.
- 4) Recognise that those who do use open spaces feel the benefit on their mental health. The extent of reporting these benefits increased considerably during 2020. These spaces are an essential resource for community wellbeing. They must be protected and prioritised.
- 5) Use the opportunities offered by Scottish Government policies or initiatives that could promote and improve access to green and open space access particularly for those without access to gardens at home or green space close by:
  - a. Provide gardens for new housing<sup>1,2</sup> and retro-fitting of existing provision<sup>3</sup>.
  - b. Ensure access to good quality green spaces within 20-minute neighbourhoods<sup>2,4</sup>.
  - c. Promote road reallocation for green active travel routes and to provide community green space<sup>2,5</sup>.
  - d. Address unequal access to green space through open space strategies and play sufficiency assessments<sup>4,6</sup>.
  - e. Re-purpose vacant and derelict land as community green space<sup>2,7</sup>.
  - f. Use community wealth building as a driver for transforming local assets, including vacant and derelict land<sup>2,8</sup>.
- 6) Act to redress gaps in data and understanding about groups not well covered in current research; those in the most marked socio-economic deprivation, and children (particularly teenage years), are missing from the evidence base in Scotland.

Survey data were collected during 25th - 26th November 2020 asking individuals to recall visits to green and open space during the previous 4 weeks. Source: University of Glasgow / YouGov - Outdoor Space and Coronavirus: November Follow-up. 2,246 online questionnaires were completed between 25th - 26th November 2020. UK wide.

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.gov.scot/publications/housing-to-2040/pages/what-is-housing-to-2040/>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.gov.scot/publications/protecting-scotland-renewing-scotland-governments-programme-scotland-2020-2021/>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.gov.scot/publications/green-infrastructure-design-placemaking/>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.gov.scot/publications/scotlands-fourth-national-planning-framework-position-statement/pages/7/>

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.gov.scot/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-safer-public-spaces-updated-guidance/>

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/asp/2019/13/contents/enacted>

<sup>7</sup> [https://www.landcommission.gov.scot/downloads/5f73555fbfe93\\_VDL%20Task%20Force%20Recommendations.pdf](https://www.landcommission.gov.scot/downloads/5f73555fbfe93_VDL%20Task%20Force%20Recommendations.pdf) <sup>8</sup>

<https://www.gov.scot/policies/cities-regions/community-wealth-building/>

## Visits to a green or open space in the past 4 weeks

Two thirds of adults (63%) reported that they had visited a green or open space in the 4 weeks prior to 25<sup>th</sup>/26<sup>th</sup> November 2020.

Those in **higher socio-economic grade** were much more likely to report visits in the previous 4 weeks (71%) than those in **lower socio-economic grade** (53%), who were also least likely of any demographic group to report a visit.

55% of individuals aged 18 to 24 had visited a green or open space in the previous 4 weeks.

Biggest change from May to Nov reported by the 65+ age group and BAME individuals. There were few differences in reported visits by sex.

# 63%

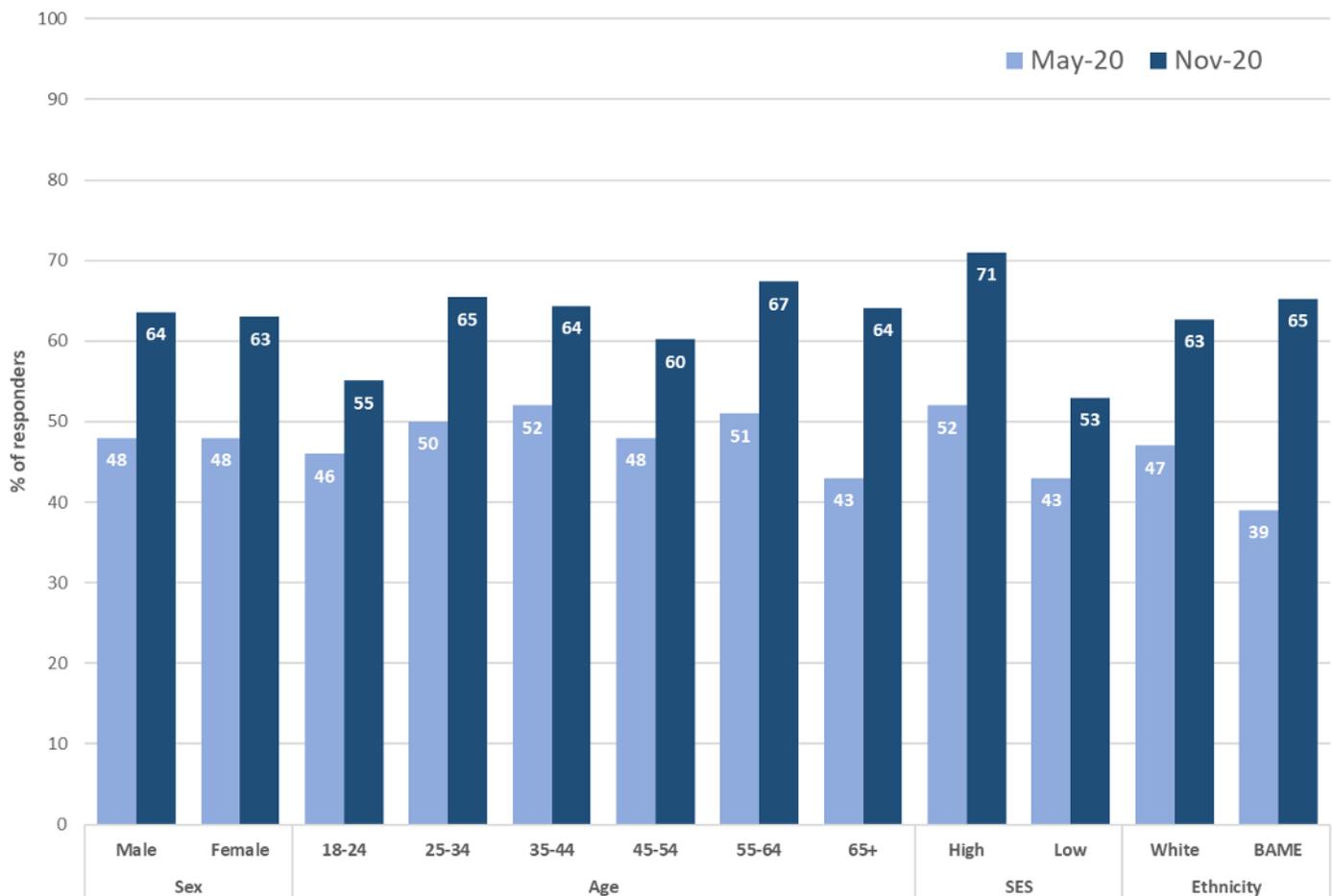
reported they visited a green or open space in the past 4 weeks.

### Comparison with previous data

Data collected **May 2020\*** from YouGov:

**48%** visited a greenspace in the previous 4 weeks.

\*During national UK lockdown restrictions.



N=2246 (full sample)

Survey Question:

**YouGov(Nov 20):** "Have you visited ANY green spaces in the last 4 weeks" (prior to 25<sup>th</sup> / 26<sup>th</sup> November).

**YouGov(May 20):** "Have you visited a green space since the movement restrictions have been enforced in the UK? (period 23<sup>rd</sup> March to 30<sup>th</sup> April)".

## Frequency of visits to any green or open space in the last 4 weeks

For those who used green and open space, frequency of visits varied considerably by individual demographic group.

Older individuals reported the highest frequency of visits, 33% of those aged 55+ visited daily and a further 33% (55 to 64) and 37% (65+) visited 2 or 3 times a week.

The proportion visiting *at least once a week* was 80% across all groups, though this varied by age, sex and ethnicity.

Those aged 35 to 44 years (75.2%), females (77%) and BAME (77%) were least likely to report visiting at least once a week.

Those aged 65+ (85%), 55 to 64 years (83%), and males (84%) were most likely to report visiting at least once a week.

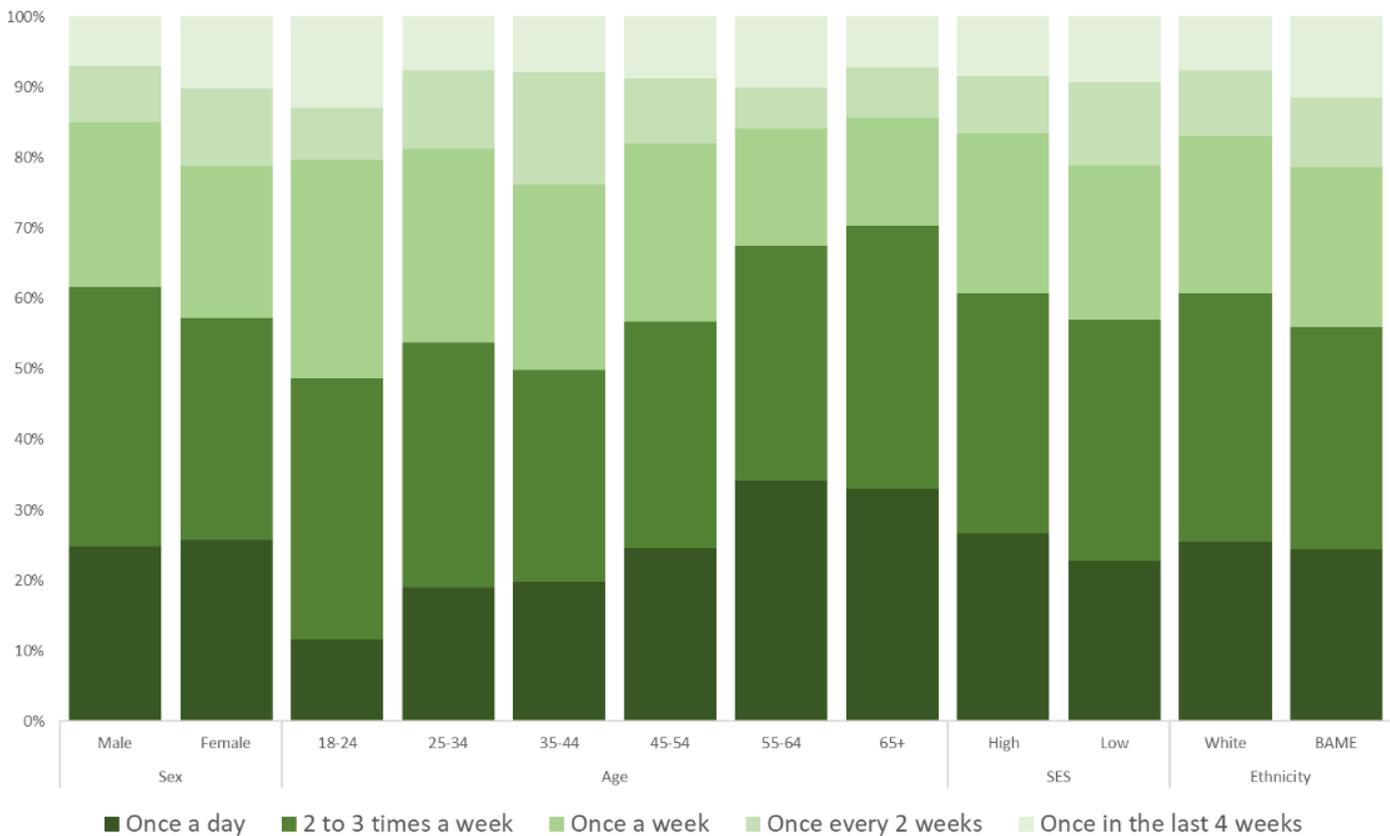
**Note: This question describes frequency of green and open space visits for those who responded 'yes' they had visited greenspace in previous 4 weeks.**

# 81%

of greenspace users, visited a green or open space on one or more occasion in the previous week.

2017 to 2018.	March to May 2020.	September 2020.
SNH Research Report 1062	NatureScot Research Report 1252	NatureScot Research Report 1255
<b>74%</b>	<b>87%</b>	<b>88%</b>

reported they visited a green or open space on one or more occasion in the previous week.



**N=1444 (includes only those who responded 'yes' they had visited greenspace in previous 4 weeks)**

**Survey Question:**

**YouGov(Nov 20):** "On average, how often have you visited ANY green spaces in the last 4 weeks (i.e. since late-October 2020)?"

## Benefit of green and open space for mental health

9 in 10 individuals reported they agreed that **being in green and open spaces benefitted their mental health.**

There were differences in how strongly individuals agreed that being in green and open space benefitted their mental health.

Middle aged individuals (35 to 54) agreed more strongly with this statement than older individuals (65+). Similarly, females agreed more strongly than males.

Although there were differences in strength of agreement, when those who **strongly** and **somewhat** agreed were combined, the total agreement that green and open space benefitted mental health was similar across sex, age, socio-economic status and ethnicity.

**Note: This question describes benefits of green and open space for those who responded 'yes' they had visited greenspace in previous 4 weeks.**

# 89%

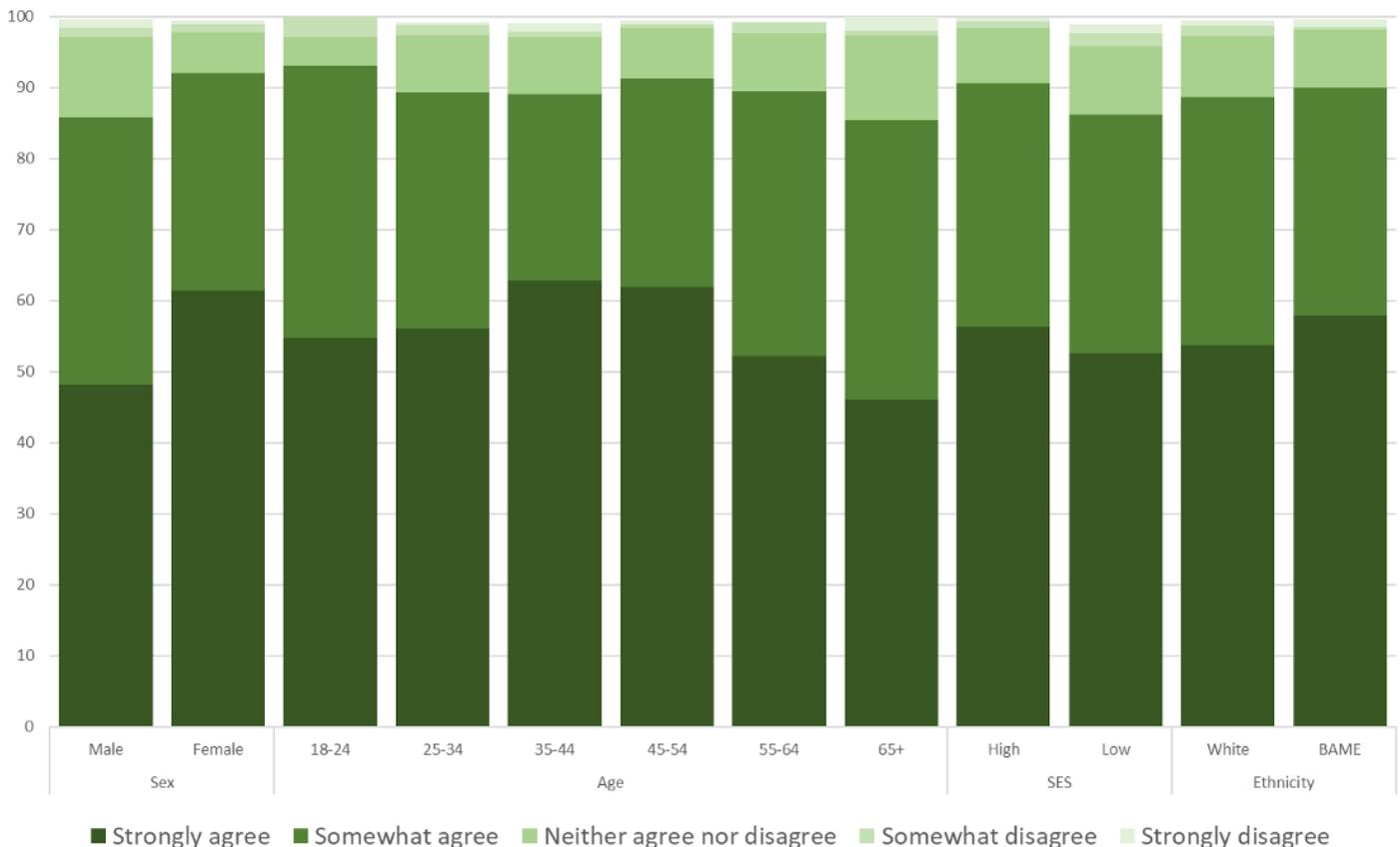
reported that being in green and open spaces benefitted their mental health.

**Comparison with previous data:**

Data collected **May 2020\*** from YouGov:

**65%** reported that being in green and open spaces benefitted their mental health.

\*During national UK lockdown restrictions.



**N=1444 (includes only those who responded 'yes' they had visited greenspace in previous 4 weeks)**

**Survey Question:**

**YouGov(Nov 20):** "To what extent do you agree or disagree that Being in green spaces benefits my mental health (e.g. it helps me relax, de-stress etc.)?"

## Barriers to visiting green and open spaces reported by non-users

For those who **did not** visit green or open spaces, **poor weather** was the most frequently reported barrier. This was reported to a similar extent by sex, age, socio-economic status and ethnicity.

**Using outside space at my home** and **being too busy** were also frequently reported as a reason for not visiting other green and open spaces. **Females** and **older individuals (55+)** were most likely to report using space at their own home.

**Younger individuals (25 to 44)** and those of **higher socio-economic status** were most likely to report being too busy as a barrier to using green and open space. Those **aged 25 to 44** and of **lower socio-economic status** reported no green spaces nearby or accessibility as a barrier to use most frequently.

**Older people** were more likely to be among those reporting a **member of their household being at higher risk of severe COVID-19** as a barrier to use.

Few people reported green and open **spaces being too busy**, or a **lack of nearby spaces** as a reason for not visiting.

The survey also found that problems with accessibility, travel, maintenance of the spaces and anti-social behaviour in them were not frequently reported as reasons for not visiting.

### Comparison with previous data collected in May 2020\*:

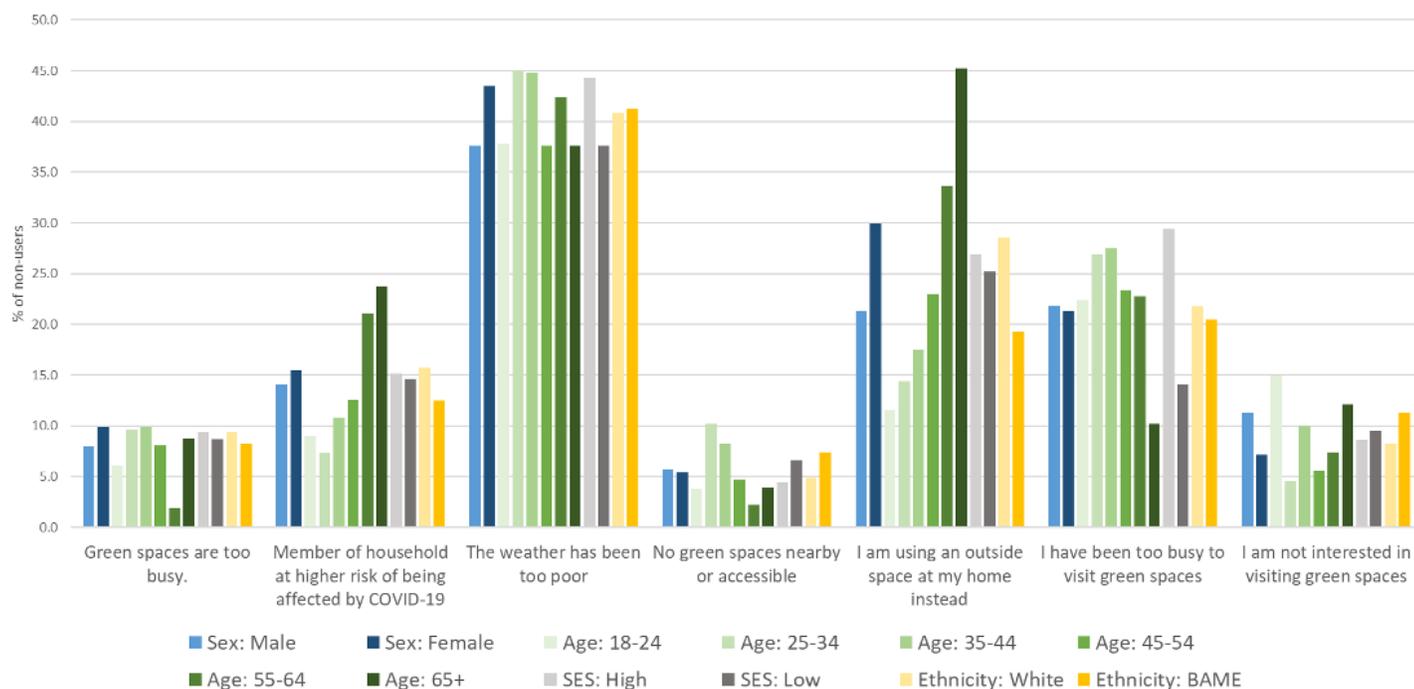
9% reported **green and open spaces are too busy** for them, similar to the 8% in May 2020.

15% reported having a **member of their household at serious health risk from COVID-19** compared to 26% in May 2020.

26% reported **using an outside space at their home instead**, compared to 47% in May 2020.

9% were **not interested in using green space**, similar to the 8% in May 2020.

\* Survey conducted during national UK lockdown restrictions.



**N=1015 (includes only those who visited a green space once every two weeks, or less often, in the last 4 weeks).**

**Survey Question: YouGov(Nov 20):** "You previously said you have visited a green space once every two weeks, or less often, in the last 4 weeks. Which, if any, of the following are your reasons for this? (Please select all that apply)"

## Google COVID-19 mobility trends in Scotland - Park visits

The *Google COVID-19 Community Mobility Reports* chart movement trends over time by geography and place. Here we have extracted data describing movement at parks by Scottish Local Authority.

Data shown is for the period 15<sup>th</sup> February 2020 to 28<sup>th</sup> February 2021. The baseline (100) is the median value from the 5-week period Jan 3<sup>rd</sup> – Feb 6<sup>th</sup>, 2020. Gaps in trends are due to the data not meeting the quality and privacy threshold held by Google and therefore withheld.

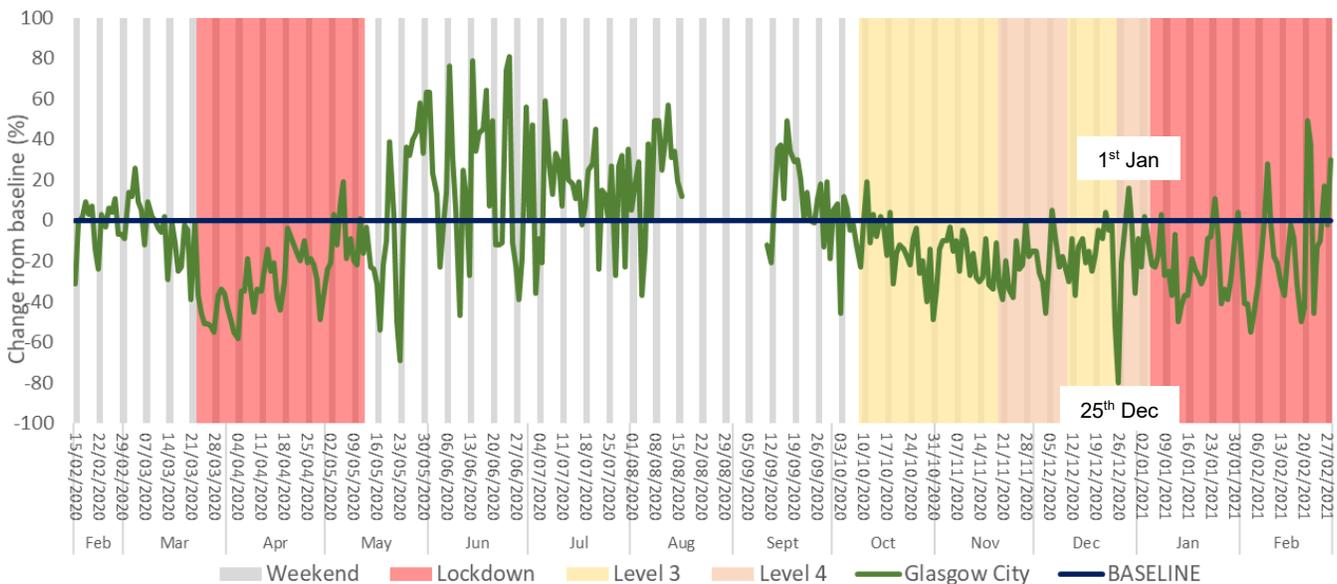
### Google COVID-19 park visit trends in Glasgow City

Following the introduction of the UK and Scottish **national lockdown on 24<sup>th</sup> March 2020**, park visits in Glasgow dropped significantly below baseline data.

A notable increase was apparent in early May 2020, this is likely to coincide with people being able to go outside more than once a day to exercise from 11<sup>th</sup> May. Day-to-day variability throughout the year is associated with daily weather.

Following Glasgow City moving to **COVID protection level 3**, a notable reduction in park use can be seen. Park use remained at similar levels when Glasgow was in COVID protection level 3 and 4.

A second **Scottish mainland national lockdown** was introduced on 5<sup>th</sup> January, initial data shows marked reductions in park use, similar to the period March to May 2020 during the initial national lockdown and higher use at weekends.



Densely populated Local Authorities displayed a similar trend to the Glasgow chart above. Rural authorities, such as Highlands, Argyll and Bute, Dumfries and Galloway and Stirling, had significantly higher increases in visits during the 2020 summer period that is likely due to tourism.

Individual local authority data available from <https://www.google.com/covid19/mobility/> or by emailing [Jonathan.Olsen@glasgow.ac.uk](mailto:Jonathan.Olsen@glasgow.ac.uk)

Source: Google LLC "Google COVID-19 Community Mobility Reports". <https://www.google.com/covid19/mobility/> Accessed: 04/03/2021.

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**The Social and Systems Recovery - Environment and Spaces Group is hosted by Public Health Scotland (PHS). The group was established to bring together evidence on how our responses to the COVID-19 pandemic have affected our environment and spaces and how people interact within these, articulate how this might impact on people's health and wellbeing, and use this to inform national and local responses to policy and practice.**

**Members of the group include colleagues from:**

**CoSLA**

**Directors of Public Health**

**Greenspace Scotland**

**GCV Green Network**

**Glasgow Centre for Population Health**

**Glasgow City Council**

**Green Action Trust**

**Healthy Homes working group**

**Improvement Service**

**Inspiring Scotland**

**Living Streets**

**NatureScot**

**Play Scotland**

**Public Health Scotland**

**Scottish Health and Inequalities Impact Assessment Network**

**Scottish Health Promotion Managers**

**Scottish Government**

**Scottish Land Commission**

**SEPA**

**University of Edinburgh**

**University of Glasgow**

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