



## **S&SR Environment and Spaces Group Report:** COVID-19 Green and Open Space Use in Spring 2021 (Wave 3) **Priorities for pandemic recovery**

**August 2021**

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## **Introduction**

The Social Systems Recovery (SSR) - Environment 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. 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 policy and practice responses.

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.
- Recommendations for actions to support future decision making.

This is the third report produced by the group and describes the green and open space use in Spring 2021. The report focuses on priorities for pandemic recovery.

## **Main findings**

- 1) During April 2021, over two thirds of adults (67%) 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, and similar to November 2020 (63%).
- 2) We found no differences in number of visits to green or open space, frequency of visits or benefits to mental health by COVID-19 vaccination status, including the time since vaccine or number of doses.
- 3) Comparing data from Wave 1 (collected a year prior (April 2020)) there was a marked increase in number of visits to green and open space, frequency of these visits and reported mental health benefits of being in these spaces. These increases were highlighted in Wave 2 data (collected in November 2020) and sustained in the most recent Wave 3 data reported here.
- 4) There remain sharp inequalities in visiting green and open space: 73% of those classified as high socio-economic status visited in the previous 4 weeks, compared to just 59% of those classified as low socio-economic status.
- 5) For those who reported use of green and open space in the previous 4 weeks, 78% 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.
- 6) 9 in 10 individuals agreed that being in green and open spaces benefitted their mental health.
- 7) For those who did not visit green or open spaces, using a space at home, being too busy and poor weather were the most frequently reported reasons.

## ***Priorities for pandemic recovery***

The SSR Environment and Spaces group have identified the following areas that require priority action by the Scottish Government, Local Authorities, the NHS and the third sector to support pandemic recovery.

These priorities have been identified based on the findings of the three SSR Environment and Spaces Group reports, in addition to other key research reports and evidence briefings published since March 2020.

### **Policy and practice priorities for pandemic recovery:**

- There has been a marked increase in visits to green and open space, frequency of visits and reported mental health benefits of being in these spaces since the first lockdown. However there have been no further gains since Wave 2 despite improved weather and the vaccination programme. Scotland's green and open spaces must be physically and fiscally protected to ensure the increase in use of green space and its associated population health and wellbeing benefits are sustained and maximised.
- Although the most recent survey wave showed two thirds of adult population used green and open spaces, one third of adults did not use these spaces. Increasing provision and use of high quality green and open spaces must remain a priority across all sectors to maximize and equalise the health benefits these spaces can provide.
- Underlying inequalities in use of green and open spaces remain and may have widened during the pandemic. Interventions to increase use of green and open space should ensure a focus on disadvantaged groups.
- The reported mental health benefits of spending time in green and open space are striking, reinforcing the need to ensure that all groups are able to benefit.
- Public mental health policy should explicitly include the benefits of green and open spaces for mental wellbeing.
- Green and open spaces at home are an important resource for those who have them. This highlights the ongoing need to ensure planning and housing policy acknowledge the different contributions of private and public greenspace and that new and existing housing provides access to gardens and green space.

## ***Research priorities to support pandemic recovery***

### **All sectors should collaborate to:**

- 1) Explore reasons for non-use of green and open spaces to provide evidence for future public health interventions to increase and equalise use and resulting health benefits.
- 2) Improve understanding of the differing experiences of using green and open spaces for population groups, such as those defined by gender, age, ethnicity and (dis)abilities.
- 3) Investigate the impacts of different approaches to neighbourhood greenspace infrastructure provision on health and wellbeing and inequality. These approaches might include, for example, new parks and parklets, re-purposing of derelict and under-used land, green infrastructure and greening streets initiatives.
- 4) Investigate the impacts of different community-led, local authority and NHS approaches to increase greenspace utilisation on health and wellbeing and inequality. These approaches might include, for example, activation, animation and therapeutic programmes that encourage and support use.

### ***Survey***

Survey data were collected during 29th - 30th April 2021 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. 2,215 online questionnaires were completed between 29th - 30th April 2021. UK wide.

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

Over two thirds of adults (67%) reported they had visited a green or open space in the 4 weeks prior to 29<sup>th</sup>/30<sup>th</sup> April 2021, similar to Autumn 2020.

Those in *higher socio-economic grade* were much more likely to report visits in the previous 4 weeks (73%) than those in *lower socio-economic grade* (59%), who were also least likely of any demographic group to report a visit.

68% of individuals aged 55 to 64 had visited a green or open space in the previous 4 weeks.

There were few differences by sex and ethnicity in reported visits.

**67%** reported they visited a green or open space in the past 4 weeks.

### Comparison with previous data

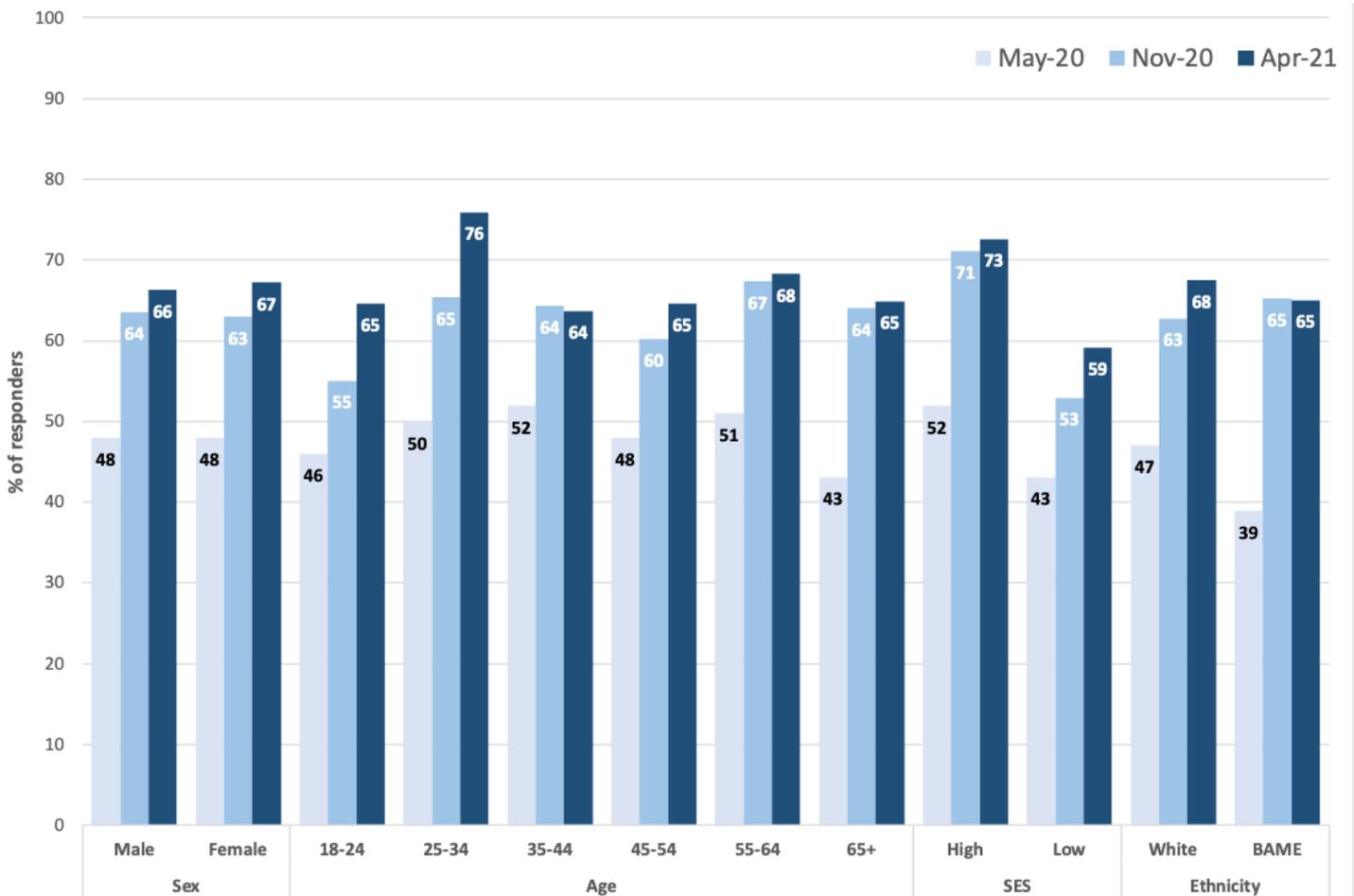
#### November 2020

63% visited a greenspace in the previous 4 weeks.

#### May 2020

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

\*During national UK lockdown restrictions.



N=2215 (full sample)

Survey Question:

YouGov( April 2021): "Have you visited ANY green spaces in the last 4 weeks (i.e. since March 2021)?"

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).

## 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: 28% of those aged 55+ visited daily and a further 34% (55 to 64) and 36% (65+) visited 2 or 3 times a week.

The proportion visiting *at least once a week* was 78% across all groups, though this varied by age, sex and ethnicity.

Those aged 65+ (82%), 55 to 64 years (82%), and males (79%) were most likely to report visiting at least once a week.

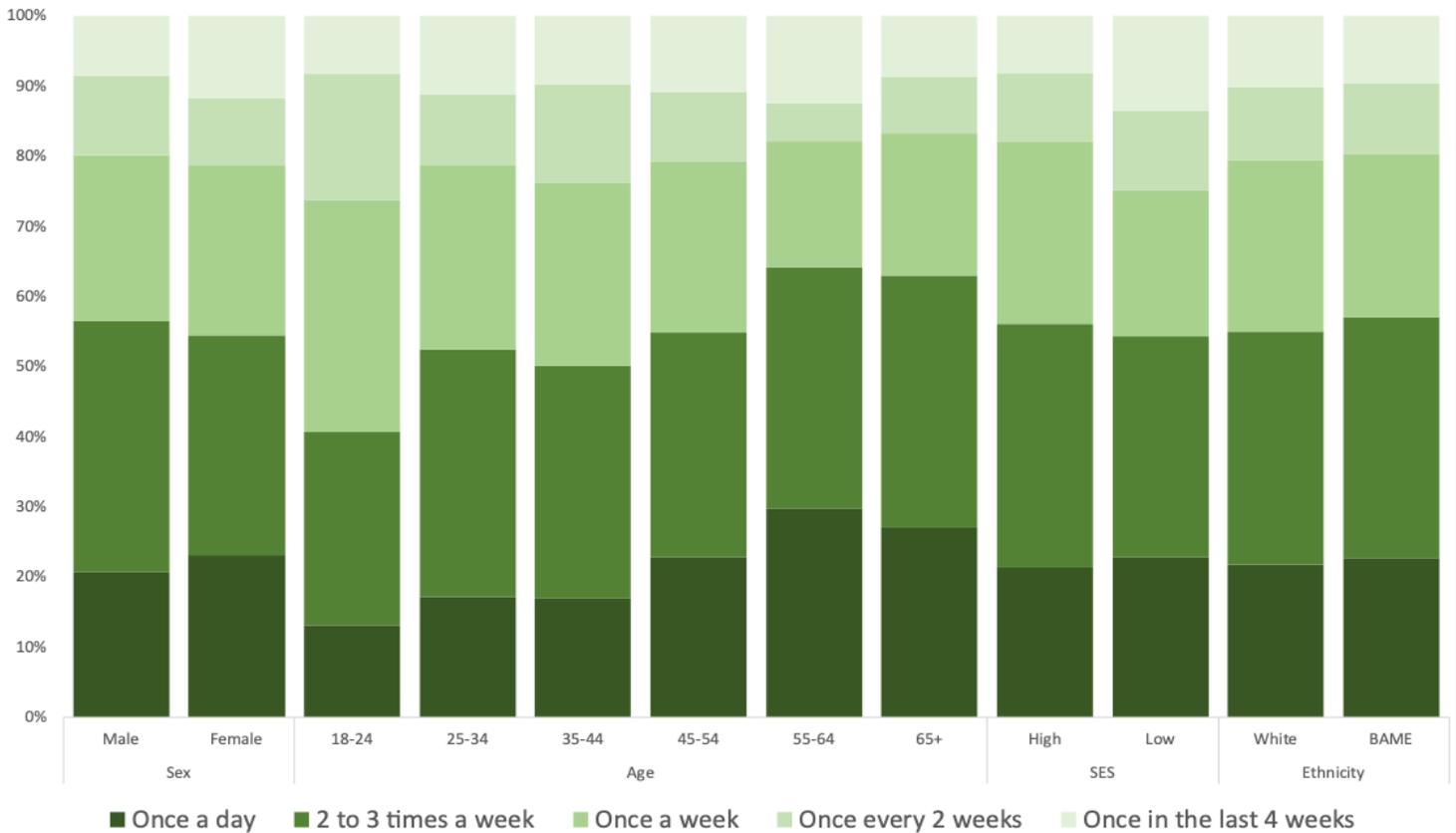
*Note: This question describes frequency of green and open space visits for those who responded 'yes' they had visited greenspace in previous 4 weeks.*

# 78%

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	November 2020
SNH Research Report 1062	NatureScot Research Report 1252	NatureScot Research Report 1255	UofG YouGov Report
74%	87%	88%	81%

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



N=1479 (includes only those who responded 'yes' they had visited greenspace in previous 4 weeks)

Survey Question:

YouGov(Apr 2021): "On average, how often have you visited ANY green spaces in the last 4 weeks (i.e. since March 2021)?"

## 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 (25 to 54) agreed more strongly with this statement than older individuals (55+). 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 from YouGov:

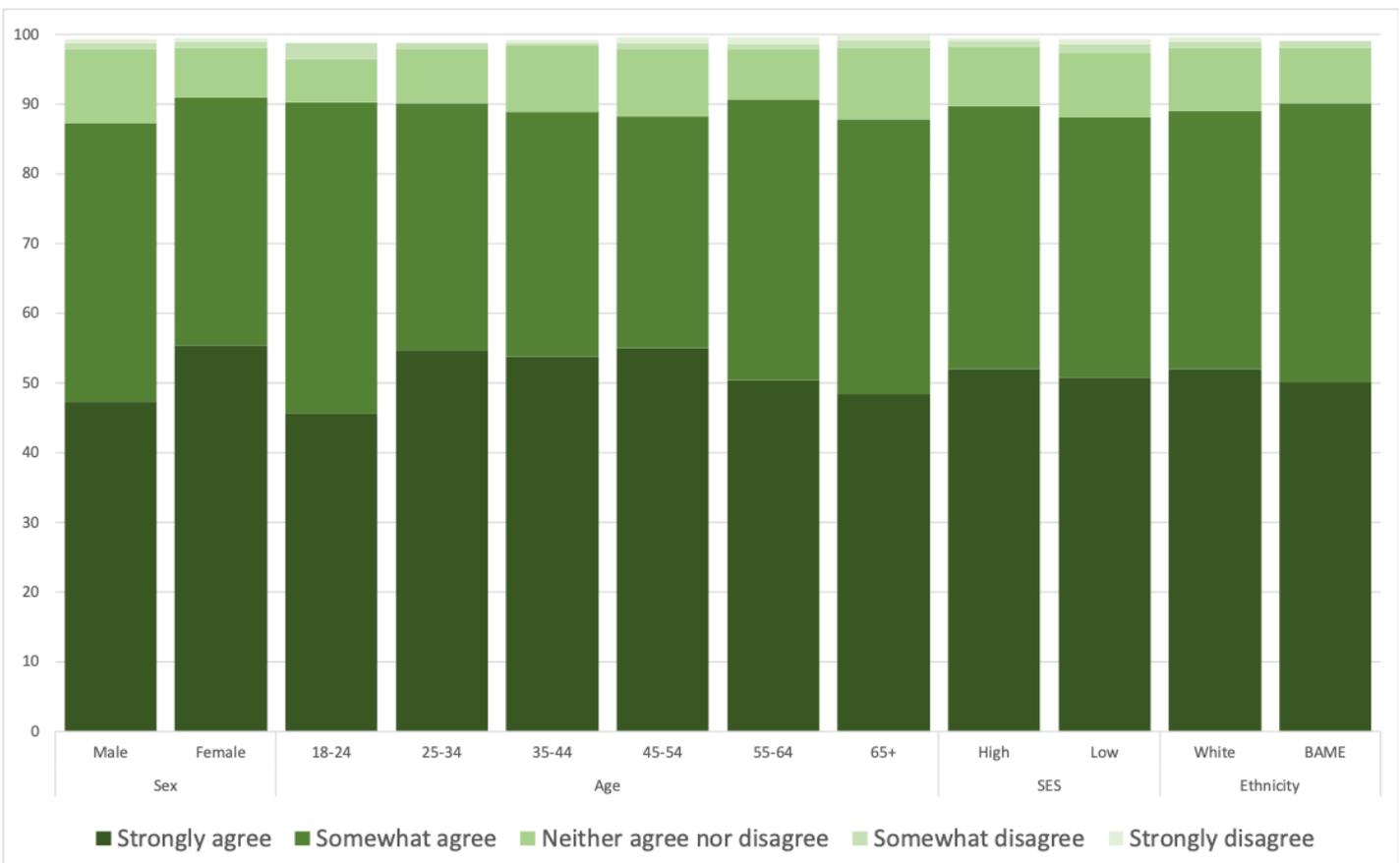
**November 2020**

**89%** reported that being in green and open spaces benefitted their mental health.

**May 2020**

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

*\*During national UK lockdown restrictions.*



N=1479 (includes only those who responded 'yes' they had visited greenspace in previous 4 weeks)

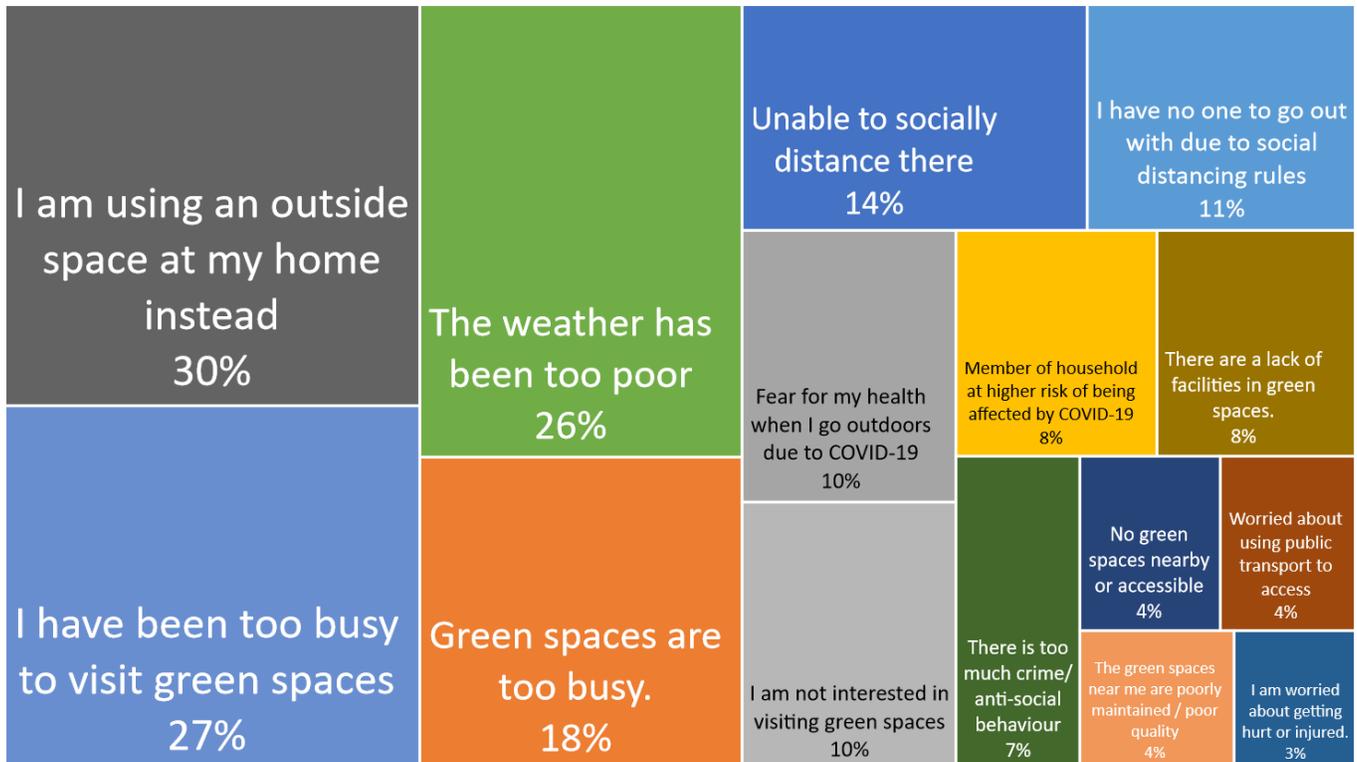
Survey Question:

YouGov(Apr 2021): "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, **using outside space at my home, being too busy** and **poor weather** were the most frequently reported reasons.

Other key barriers reported were **green spaces being too busy, being unable to socially distance there** and **not having anyone to visit these spaces with due to COVID restrictions**.



**N=987** (includes only those who visited a green space once every two weeks, or less often, in the last 4 weeks).

**Survey Question:**

**YouGov(Apr 2021):** 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)"

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

**Using outside space at my home** was the most frequently reported reason for not using public green and open space.

**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 **being unable to socially distance there** as a barrier to use.

**Green spaces being too busy** and **being uninterested in visiting green and open spaces** were reported to a similar extent by sex, age, socio-economic status and ethnicity.

### Comparison with previous data collected in November 2020:

18% reported *green and open spaces are too busy* for them, higher than the 9% in Nov 2020.

14% reported they were *unable to socially distance there*, similar to 14% in Nov 2020.

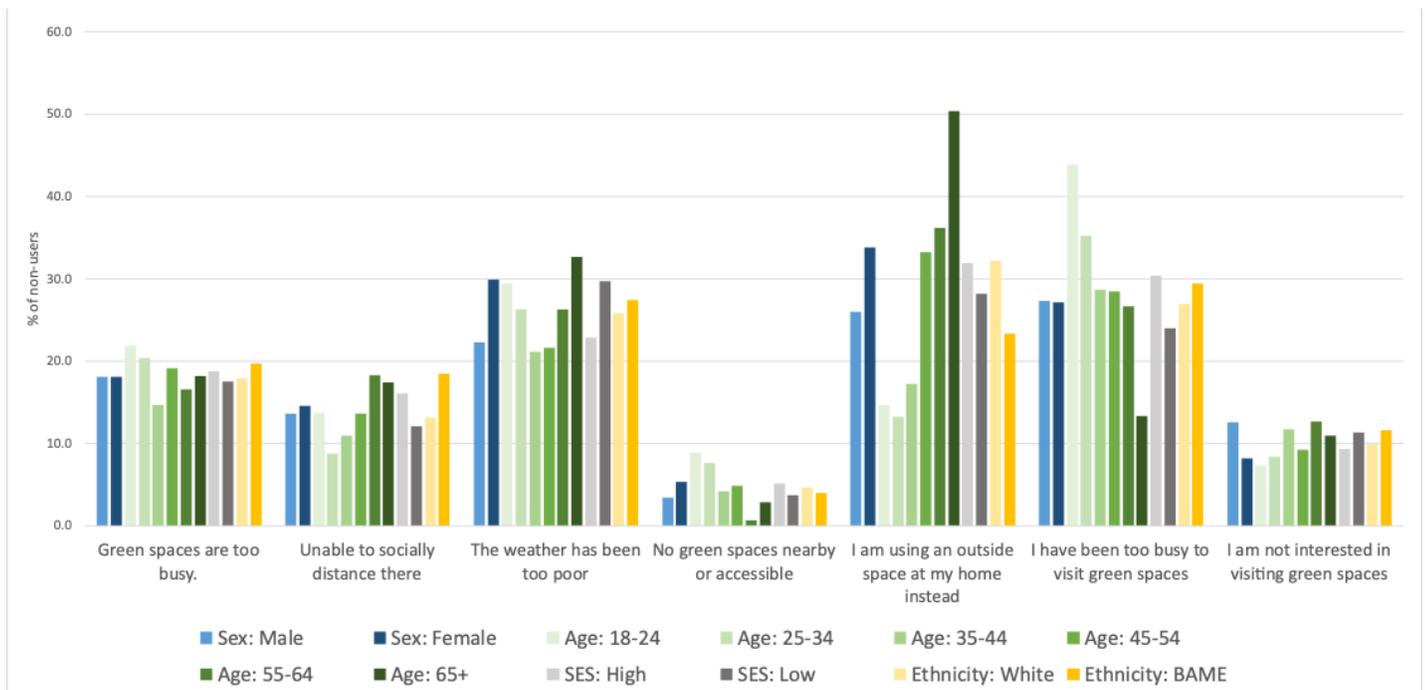
26% reported *the weather has been too poor*, lower than the 41% in Nov 2020.

4% reported *they had no green spaces nearby or accessible*, compared to 6% in Nov 2020.

30% reported *using an outside space at their home instead*, compared to 26% in Nov 2020.

27% reported *they have been too busy to visit green spaces*, compared to 21% in Nov 2020.

10% were *not interested in using green space*, similar to the 9% in Nov 2020.



N=987 (includes only those who visited a green space once every two weeks, or less often, in the last 4 weeks).

Survey Question:

YouGov(Apr 2021): 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)"

August 2021

## COVID-19 vaccine and visiting green and open spaces

There was little variation in visits to green or open space in the previous 4 weeks or reported mental health benefit of being in green and open space for those who had or had not had a COVID-19 vaccine, including the time since vaccine or number of doses.

Frequency of visits was lower for those who reported they had not received a COVID-19 vaccine. This is likely to be associated with age as we have as previously reported younger individuals visit less frequently than those older.

**32%** reported they **had not received** the COVID-19 vaccine.

**7%** reported they had received **1 vaccine dose** in the past 3 weeks.

**31%** reported they had received **1 vaccine dose** over 3 weeks ago.

**27%** reported they had received **2 vaccine doses**.

\*3% preferred not to say.

COVID-19 Vaccine	COVID-19 vaccine administered by the NHS			
	No, I haven't	Less than 3 weeks first dose	More than 3 weeks first dose	2 doses
I have visited a green or open space in the previous 4 weeks (Yes, %)	69	67	69	67
I have visited a green or open space on one or more occasions in the previous week (Yes, %)	75	80	80	81
I agree that being in green and open spaces benefits my mental health (Yes, %)	91	89	88	88

N=2215 (full sample)

Survey Question:

YouGov (Apr 2021): "Have you had a COVID-19 vaccine administered by the NHS?"

## 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 10<sup>th</sup> May 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.

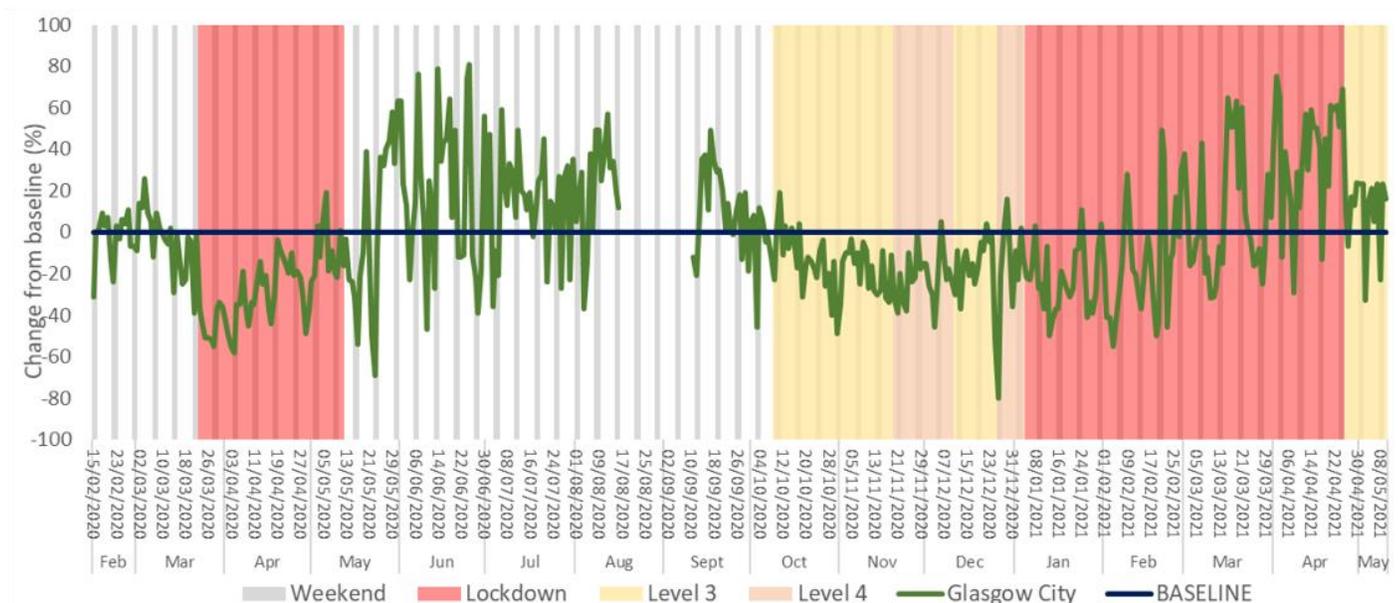
### Google COVID-19 park visit trends in Glasgow City

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.

Following Glasgow City moving to **COVID protection level 3 in October 2020**, 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.

Park use increased from **March 2021 above baseline levels** and decreases can be seen in **May 2021**, this may be due to poor weather rather than Glasgow moving to **COVID protection level 3**.



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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**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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