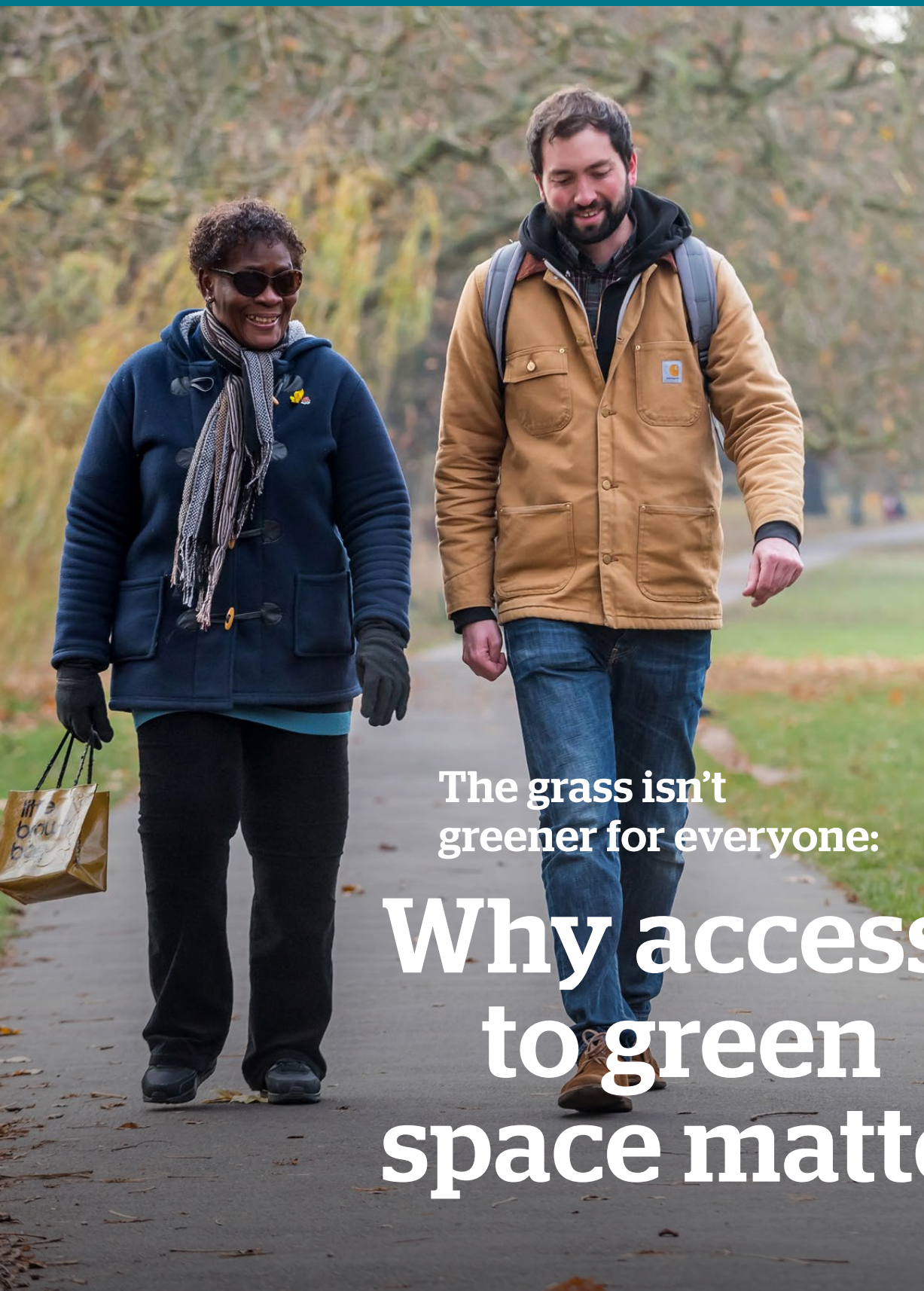





**ramblers**  
at the heart of walking



The grass isn't  
greener for everyone:

**Why access  
to green  
space matters**





**The COVID-19 pandemic has changed our relationship with nature and the outdoors. As we emerge from lockdown, we have an opportunity to reshape the places we live in and reconnect people to the natural world.**

**Millions have found comfort in walking and nature since COVID-19 restrictions were introduced in March 2020. The pandemic has changed our relationship with the places where we live, what we want from them and what's important to us in the future. Our appreciation of local green spaces has grown, and we want them to be wilder, greener and more accessible.**

For many, walking provides a much-needed sense of freedom, helping us to stay healthy and boost our wellbeing during difficult times. During lockdown, more of us than ever hit weekly targets for physical activity, with walking the most popular form of physical activity – and we intend to keep it up. In fact, we plan to walk more in future than we did before the pandemic, whether it's to get from A to B, to socialise, for fun or to boost our health and wellbeing.

However, we did not experience lockdown equally. Evidence has long shown that poor access to green space is bad for our health – physically and mentally – and that it widens the gap in health outcomes between the richest and poorest in society. But, COVID-19 brought the personal cost into sharp focus. The value of being able to go for a walk, connect with nature and de-stress, hit home. Access to green spaces meant having somewhere to take the kids, exercise, hear the birds and feel part of the local community.

# Introduction

Easy access to green spaces makes us healthier and happier, improves our sense of community and encourages us to take positive action to protect the environment. It's good for the economy too: in England, over £2 billion every year could be saved in health costs alone if everyone had good access to green space – a result of increased physical activity. Yet, nearly 3 million people across Great Britain live more than a 10-minute walk from a park. Our most deprived communities are less likely to have green space close to home and more likely to live outside the catchment area of nationally important green space, like our National Parks.

## It's time for change.

We believe that everyone, everywhere should have easy access to high quality green spaces close to where they live (defined as within a five-minute walk from home). The COVID-19 pandemic has shown how important that is to our health and happiness, and how urgently we need to address gaps in access to green space. The Environment Bill, currently in parliament, is an opportunity to make this happen. The Bill will require the government to set targets that help to protect the environment and restore nature. But it misses an opportunity when it comes to reconnecting people to nature.

**We're calling on the government to guarantee that no one lives more than five-minutes' walk from green spaces, by requiring national targets for access to nature under the Environment Bill.**

**Join us!**



# Key findings

On 21 August 2020, the Ramblers and YouGov asked 2,012 GB adults to tell us more about the places where they live, their attitude to walking and nature, and whether this had changed due to COVID-19<sup>1</sup>.

1

People value being able to access nature and green space more than ever

2

People intend to walk more in future – particularly for leisure and to improve health and wellbeing

3

A higher proportion of women, younger people and people from BAME backgrounds intend to walk more after COVID-19

4

People on a low income are less likely to have good access to green space

5

Green spaces are most important to people as a good place for a walk

6

Green spaces are a good place to relax and boost our wellbeing and physical health

7

The places where we live aren't as green as we would like them to be

8

Less traffic and better routes for walking, as well as greener, more natural local places, would improve people's quality of life

9

People from BAME backgrounds are less likely to have good access to green spaces

10

Green spaces are important to almost everyone

## About the Ramblers

The Ramblers are passionate about protecting the spaces we love to walk and helping everyone, everywhere connect to nature through walking.

With nearly 100,000 members, we are Britain's largest walking charity. We are dedicated to looking after paths and green spaces, leading walks, opening new places to explore and encouraging everyone to get outside and discover how walking boosts health and happiness.

For 85 years the Ramblers' campaigning has dramatically increased opportunities for the public to enjoy walking and access the outdoors.





# Has COVID-19 changed our attitude to nature and green spaces?

As our movements were restricted by lockdown, we found comfort in nature and walking. We visited our local green spaces more often and many of us began to walk more – or discovered the joys of walking for the first time.

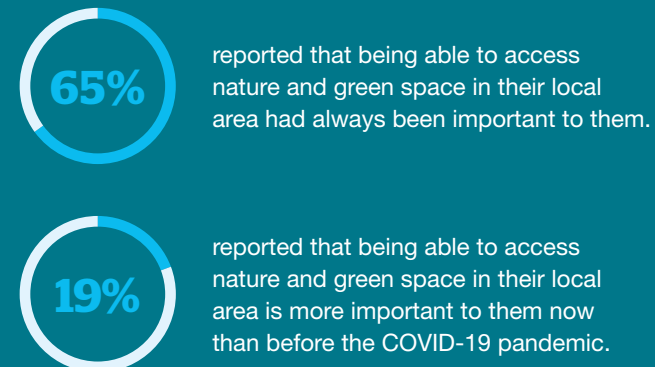
Visits to parks and green spaces have steadily increased over recent years, nearly doubling across the last decade<sup>2</sup>. That trend continued over the first months of lockdown, with one in three of us visiting local green spaces more often<sup>3</sup>.

It's not just green spaces that saw a surge in popularity. Across Britain, 74% of people took up some form of exercise, with six in ten women and half of men taking up walking – making it the most popular form of lockdown exercise<sup>4</sup>.

## What our research found

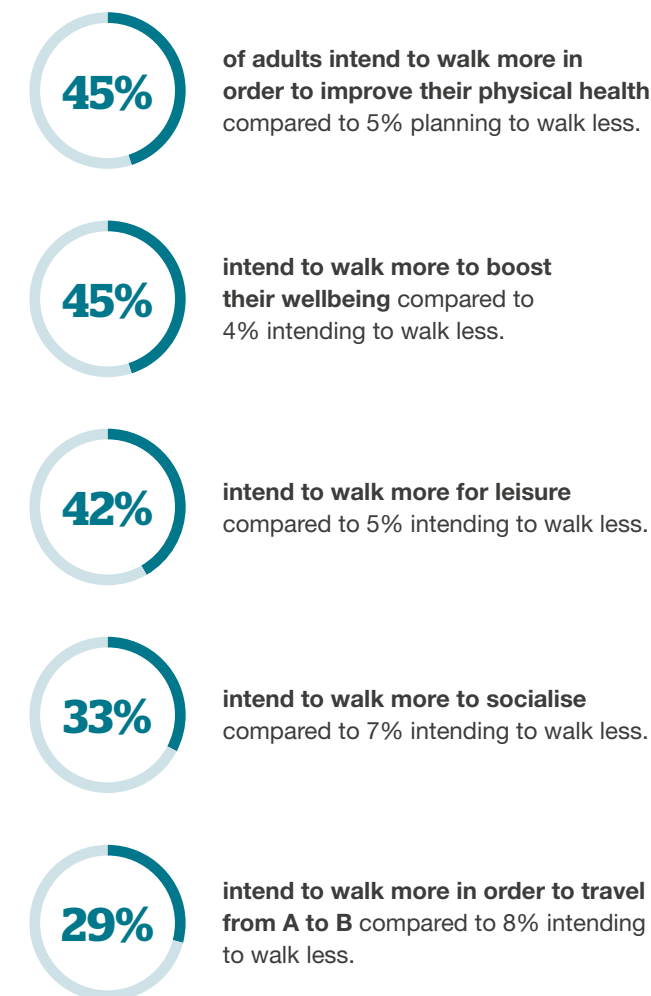
### 1. People value being able to access nature and green space more than ever

We asked people whether COVID-19 and lockdown had affected their attitude to green spaces, like parks and the wider countryside:



### 2. People intend to walk more in future – particularly for leisure and to improve health and wellbeing

We asked whether people intended to walk more or less often when COVID-19 restrictions have all ended, compared to before the pandemic. We wanted to understand what motivated people to walk more, so we asked them whether they planned to walk more or less to improve their physical health, boost their wellbeing, for leisure, to socialise and to travel from A to B.



## Terry's story

We live in a flat in a built-up area, and we've no private garden, but it's still lovely because we have access to two nature reserves within a few minutes' walk – proximity is everything when you don't drive and there's minimal public transport.

It's when I'm outdoors and away from machine noises that I feel my connection to the whole planet most. In green spaces, I feel self-aware and at the same time connected to everything I'm hearing and seeing. Sometimes, it's overwhelming. On my regular short-walk around the fields I can hear birds which I think are skylarks. The very first time I heard them I got a lump in my throat, the freshness of seeing something so new, that I'd never experienced before, brought me to tears of joy. How lucky I am.

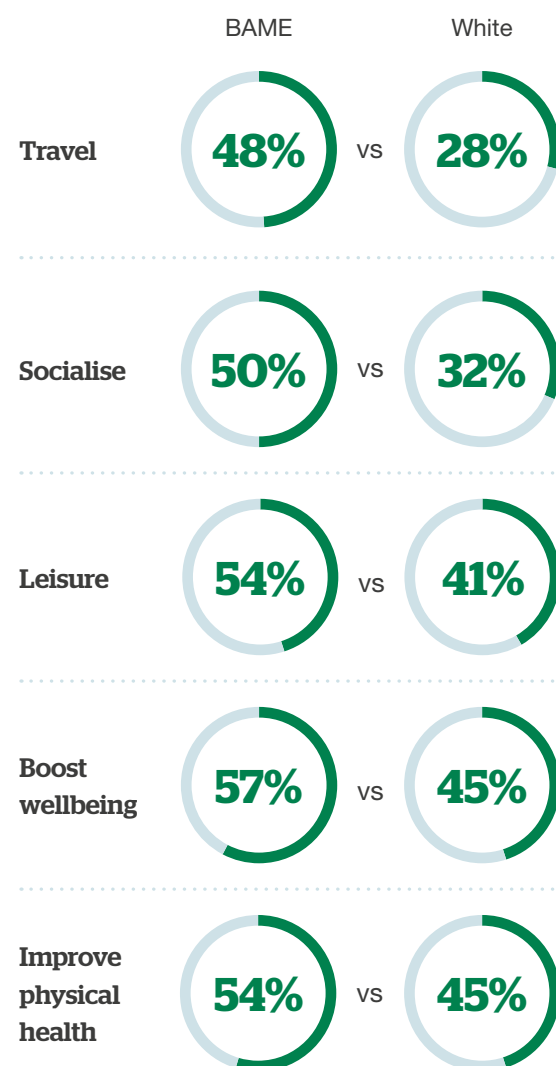




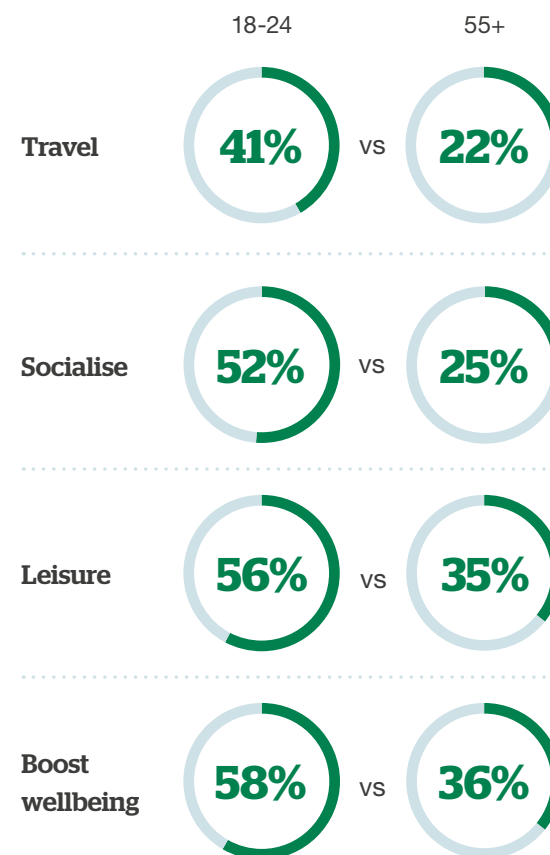
### 3. A higher proportion of women, younger people and people from BAME backgrounds intend to walk more after COVID-19

Some groups were more likely than others to report that they intend to walk more in future.

**People from black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME) backgrounds<sup>5</sup>** – The intention to walk more was higher for people who identified as BAME than those who identified as white. This was the case across all categories.



**Younger people** – People aged 18-24 intend to walk more across all categories than those aged 55 and over.



**Women** – The intention to walk more is significantly higher for women than men across all categories.

## How important is access to nature?

**It should be no surprise that, during a time of global anxiety, we reached for nature. Easy access to nature and green spaces makes us healthier and happier.**

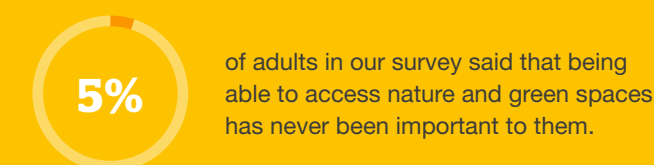
For nine out of ten of us, spending time in nature is an important part of our life<sup>6</sup>. Spending just two hours in nature each week boosts our health and happiness<sup>7</sup>, and how green our local area is has a big impact on our physical and mental health, our wellbeing and the health and resilience of our communities. The closer we live to green spaces, the more likely we are to be physically active and have lower levels of a whole range of health issues, including obesity, cardiovascular disease, Type 2 diabetes, anxiety and depression<sup>8,9</sup>.

It's not just quantity: the quality of green space is important too. Places that are rich in wildlife are associated with improved health and wellbeing<sup>10</sup>, and we know that a lack of facilities, poor maintenance and fears about safety can prevent people from accessing local parks<sup>11</sup>. There is strong public support for enhancing local green spaces – by introducing more wilderness and wildlife, better maintaining paths and creating more sign posted walks<sup>12</sup>.

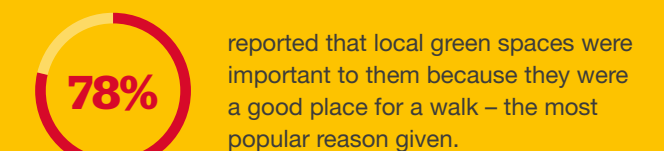
### What our research found

We asked people why local green spaces were important to them, how they'd describe their local area and what changes would most improve their quality of life. This is what they told us:

#### 4. Green spaces are important to almost everyone

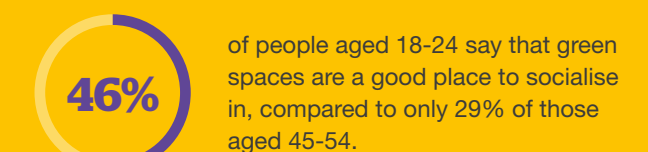
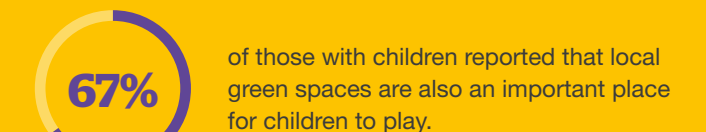
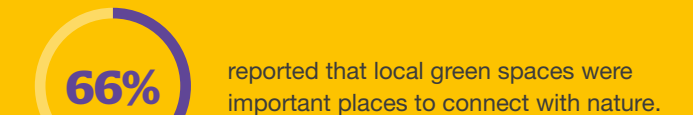
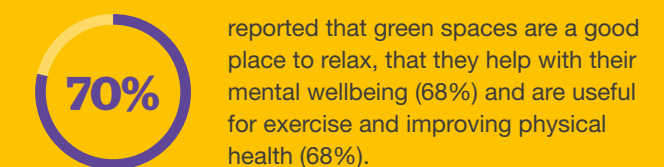


#### 5. Green spaces are most important to people as a good place for a walk



#### 6. Green spaces are a good place to relax and boost our wellbeing and physical health

Green spaces are important to us for a range of reasons. These reasons can vary depending on our age, gender, ethnicity and family circumstances:

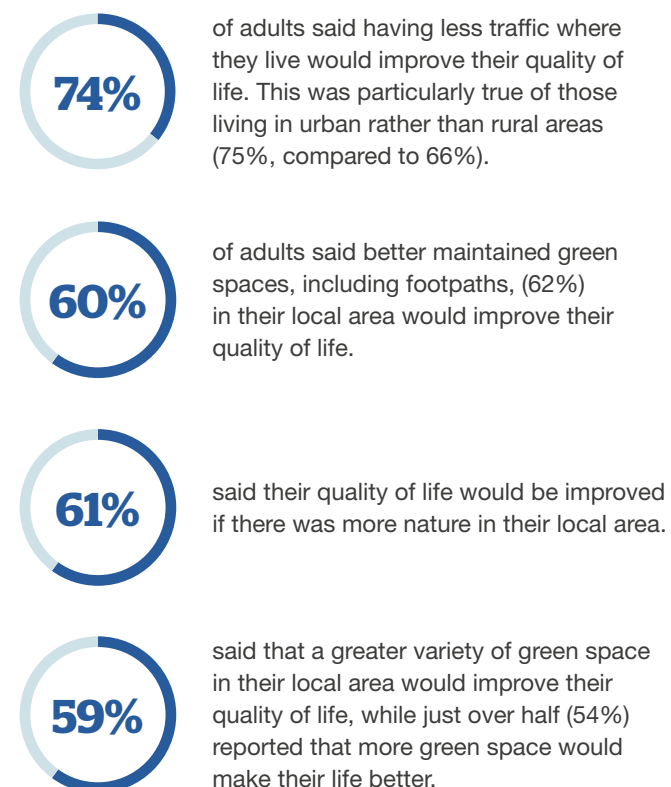




7. **The places where we live aren't as green as we would like them to be**



8. **Less traffic and better routes for walking, as well as greener, more natural local places, would improve people's quality of life**



Younger people (aged 18-44) and people in urban areas were more likely to say that better walking routes, better maintained green spaces, more nature, more green spaces and a greater variety of green space would improve their quality of life.

## Kimberley's story

I grew up in North West London and while I would walk to the park and shops with my family, I didn't go on many long walks as a child. Whereas a lot of my friends grew up in places like Devon, and they were very used to going for walks in the countryside.

Having time in open spaces helps me think. I walk in London – to and from meetings, and the station for work etc – but it is nice to go at a slower pace, to live more slowly at the weekends, but without having to go too far from where I live – there is nice scenery on your doorstep too.

For me, walking is not just about physical fitness – it is about mental health too. On a walk, you can't keep checking your emails, do life admin or go on Instagram – we all put our phones away and only get them out to take pictures. I think if you look after your physical and your mental wellbeing you are naturally healthier and happier.



# Is access to nature equal?

**We all have a right to access nature, wherever we live and whatever our background. COVID-19 has exacerbated existing inequalities in our access to nature and green space.**

For the one in eight households with no access to a private or shared garden<sup>13</sup>, public parks and local green spaces are particularly important. Yet, not only are people living in our most deprived communities less likely to have access to a garden, they are also less likely to have green spaces close to home<sup>14 15</sup>.

2.7 million people across Great Britain live more than a 10-minute walk from a public park<sup>16</sup>. At a time when our public parks have never been more important and more valued, this figure is in fact set to worsen, rising by 5% over the next five years<sup>17</sup>. That is likely to disproportionately affect people who live in lower income areas and people from black, Asian and other minority ethnic backgrounds, who already have the poorest access to green spaces<sup>18</sup>. It's not just access to local green spaces: deprived communities also have poorer access to flagship green spaces, like our National Parks.

## Fact-check

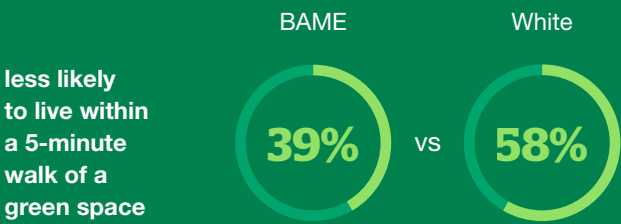
- The richest 20% of areas in England have five times the amount of green spaces compared to the most deprived 10%<sup>19</sup>.
- Nearly half of the most deprived areas in England are outside the 15-mile catchment area of a National Park or Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty<sup>20</sup>.
- Only 1% of visitors to National Parks are from a BAME background, despite making up 10% of the national population<sup>21</sup>.
- Nine out of ten visitors to a National Park have access to a car, compared to only half of UK households<sup>22</sup>.

## What our research found

We asked people how long it took to walk from their home to green spaces. Our definition of green space was broader than just public parks – we asked people to think about any green space where they could go for a walk, whether nearby fields or a canal path. Overall, 57% of us can walk to green space within five minutes. But, access to nature and green space is far from equal.

### 9. People who identify as being from a black, Asian or minority ethnic background are less likely to have good access to green space

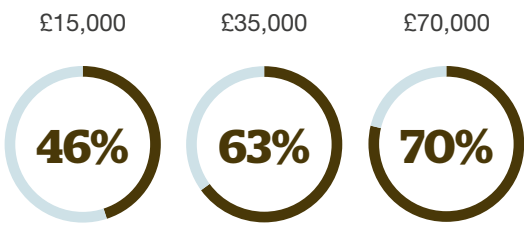
Our survey found that people who identify as being from a black, Asian or minority ethnic<sup>23</sup> background are:



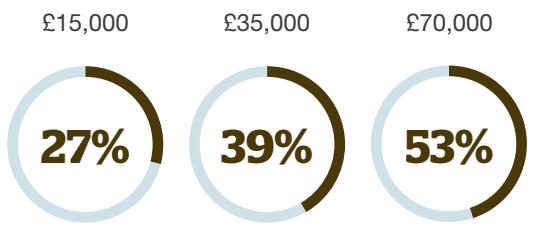
### 10. People on a low incomes are less likely to have good access to green space

Our survey found that people with an annual household income under £15,000 are:

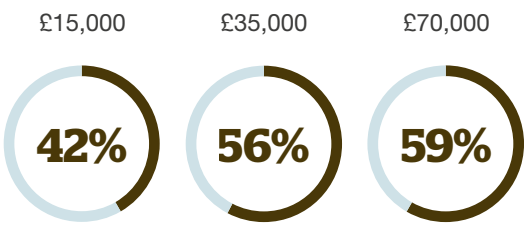
less likely to live within a 5-minute walk of a green space



less likely to live somewhere where the streets are green, with lots of trees and plants



less likely to report good walking routes where they live



# Put access to nature at the centre of the Environment Bill

**Now is the time to be ambitious: to put people and nature first and create places that make us happier, healthier and more connected. We're calling on the government to learn the lessons of lockdown and put people's access to nature at the heart of the Environment Bill.**

Millions of us have found comfort in walking and nature since COVID-19 restrictions were introduced in March 2020. We appreciate our green spaces now more than ever and we plan to walk more in future than we did before the pandemic, whether it's to get from A to B, to socialise, for fun or to boost our health and wellbeing. The pandemic and lockdown have changed what's important to us and what we want from the places we live in.

Recovery from the crisis is an opportunity to boost walking and ensure that everyone, everywhere has easy access to nature and green space. Our green spaces also deliver huge economic, environmental and social benefits. Britain's mountains, moorlands and heaths alone are estimated to have a value of £20 billion in carbon capture, air quality and recreational benefits<sup>24</sup>. Local parks and green spaces across the UK are estimated to provide people with over £34 billion of health and wellbeing benefits<sup>25</sup>. In England, over £2 billion every year could be saved in health costs alone if everyone had good access to green spaces, a result of increased physical activity<sup>26</sup>.

**The Ramblers are calling on the government to guarantee that no one lives more than five minutes' walk from a green space, by requiring national targets for access to nature under the Environment Bill.**

Measures to improve green spaces and create places that are better for walking have huge public support. Recent polls show that eight out of ten people support measures in their local area to improve walking and cycling<sup>27</sup>, while six out of ten think that protecting and enhancing green spaces should be a higher priority for the government<sup>28</sup>.

**Action for the government:**

**The Environment Bill is the most important piece of environmental legislation for a generation.**

It's an opportunity, not only to protect the environment and restore nature, but also to reconnect people to the natural world. The Bill already requires the government to set legally-binding targets that help to drive improvements in biodiversity, water, air and waste reduction. But, it misses an opportunity when it comes to reconnecting people to nature. That's why we're calling on the government to introduce long-term, legally-binding targets that guarantee people's access to nature and green spaces.

# References

<sup>1</sup> All figures, unless otherwise stated, are from YouGov Plc. Total sample size was 2012 adults. Fieldwork was undertaken between 21st - 24th August 2020. The survey was carried out online. The figures have been weighted and are representative of all GB adults (aged 18+).

<sup>2</sup> National Trust, July 2020.  
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<sup>3</sup> CPRE, May 2020.  
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<sup>4</sup> YouGov, April 2020.  
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<sup>5</sup> This includes people who identified as being Asian/ Asian British, Black/ African/ Caribbean/ Black British, Mixed/ Multiple Ethnic Group, Arab or from another ethnic group. Survey numbers limit the amount of analysis that can be done for each of these categories.

<sup>6</sup> Natural England, 19 March 2020.  
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<sup>7</sup> New Scientist, 13 June 2019.  
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<sup>8</sup> Houses of Parliament, Parliamentary Office of Sport and Technology, 2016.  
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<sup>9</sup> Public Health England, March 2020.  
[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/904439/Improving\\_access\\_to\\_greenpace\\_2020\\_review.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/904439/Improving_access_to_greenpace_2020_review.pdf)

<sup>10</sup> Wildlife Trusts and the University of Essex, 2015.  
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<sup>11</sup> Ramblers and TCPA, 2018.  
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<sup>12</sup> CPRE, May 2020.  
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<sup>13</sup> ONS, May 2020.  
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<sup>14</sup> ONS, May 2020.  
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<sup>15</sup> BMJ, May 2020.  
<https://blogs.bmj.com/bmj/2020/07/03/covid-19-has-highlighted-the-inadequate-and-unequal-access-to-high-quality-green-spaces/>

<sup>16</sup> Fields in Trust, May 2020.  
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<sup>17</sup> Fields in Trust, May 2020.  
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<sup>18</sup> Natural England, September 2019.  
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<sup>23</sup> This includes people who identified as being Asian/ Asian British, Black/ African/ Caribbean/ Black British, Mixed/ Multiple Ethnic Group, Arab or from another ethnic group. Survey numbers limit the amount of analysis that can be done for each of these categories.

<sup>24</sup> ONS, July 2019.  
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<sup>25</sup> Fields in Trust, 2018.  
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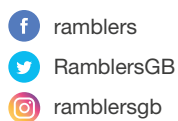
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**ramblers.org.uk**



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