

# Chalkscapes

co-creating spaces for supporting  
diverse communities to use  
greenspaces and the countryside

RESEARCH REPORT March 2024

Nasreen Ali, Isabella Kabasinguzi, Erica Cook and Gurch Randhawa

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## 1 Introduction

The *Chalkscapes* landscape partnership project was developed by the Chilterns National Landscape (formerly the Chilterns Conservation Board) to inspire people to understand and care for the Northern part of the Chilterns Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty.

One element of the project's development was to explore how best to deliver landscape-scale conservation and community engagement, giving urgent support to the wildlife, heritage and communities which face unprecedented and relentless levels of housing, infrastructure growth and environmental pressures.

As part of developing the *Chalkscapes* partnership, the University of Bedfordshire was commissioned by the Chilterns National Landscape to undertake a research project to engage with people living in Luton and Dunstable. Diversity and inclusion are a

high priority for the Chilterns National Landscape, and the aim of the research was to co-create solutions for supporting people from minority backgrounds and/or deprived areas to use and benefit from greenspaces and the countryside. The objectives for the research were to:

- Ascertain the **current level of engagement** with greenspaces and the countryside;
- Understand the **barriers and enablers for accessing greenspaces and the countryside**;
- **Co-create sustainable, scalable activities** which overcome the identified barriers.

This report summarises the results from the research and makes recommendations for the next steps. The project was made possible through a grant from the National Lottery Heritage Fund.

## 2 Key findings

 <b>Barriers</b>	 <b>Recommendations</b>
<p><b>Limited awareness about greenspaces and the Chilterns countryside</b></p> <p>(a) Lack of information about the availability of greenspaces and the Chilterns countryside</p> <p>(b) Limited knowledge about the availability, location, transport, cost, facilities and benefits of using greenspaces and the Chilterns countryside</p> <p>(c) White British and Indian participants were significantly more likely to be aware of greenspaces when compared to Bangladeshi, Pakistani, black African and white 'other' participants</p> <p>(d) Participants who had a disability were less aware of greenspaces around them compared to those with no disclosed disability</p>	<p><b>Increase awareness about greenspaces and the Chilterns countryside</b></p> <p>(a) Increase community awareness through sharing information about the Chilterns in accessible community languages/methods, e.g. using artificial intelligence (AI)</p> <p>(b) Provide more information disseminated through community and religious organisations, local community radio stations, advertising in cinemas, shopping centres and the back of buses and social media</p> <p>(c) Provide more information about the health benefits of using greenspaces and the Chilterns countryside</p>
<p><b>Lack of essential facilities in greenspaces and the Chilterns countryside</b></p> <p>(a) Anxieties about the lack of essential facilities</p>	<p><b>Improve information on the availability of essential facilities in greenspaces and the Chilterns countryside</b></p> <p>(a) Provide information about the facilities, such as the availability of parking, free parking, toilets, restaurants, benches and children's play areas available in greenspaces and the Chilterns countryside in accessible community languages/methods, e.g. using artificial intelligence (AI) to encourage visits.</p>
<p><b>Ability to travel to greenspaces and the Chilterns countryside</b></p> <p>(a) Concerns about lack of personal transport, lack of familiarity with using public transport, cost/affordability of petrol or transport costs</p>	<p><b>Provide organised subsidised trips to increase access to greenspaces and the Chilterns countryside</b></p> <p>(a) Support diverse communities and the most vulnerable and marginalised within those communities (elderly, women, single mothers, low-income families) to use greenspaces and the Chilterns countryside through organised, subsidised group trips</p>
<p><b>Concerns about racism and discrimination, and health and safety in greenspaces and the Chilterns countryside</b></p> <p>(a) Experiences and concerns about racism and discrimination because of religious-cultural dress, e.g. <i>hijab</i> (headscarf), the <i>niqab</i> (veil), South Asian <i>salwar kameez</i> (dress) and people with visible disabilities</p>	<p><b>Reduce concerns about racism and discrimination, and health and safety in greenspaces and the Chilterns countryside</b></p> <p>(a) Increase visibility of diverse religious-cultural communities and people with visible disabilities in publicity materials for greenspaces and the Chilterns countryside</p> <p>(b) Make greenspaces and the Chilterns countryside more relevant to diverse communities, e.g. by organising culturally specific music events, plays and poetry events to generate interest, and provide information on Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic hidden histories in the countryside</p>
<p><b>Anxiety of unleashed dogs</b></p> <p>(a) Some people had a fear of unleashed dogs which prevented them from using greenspaces</p>	<p><b>Provide clearly signposted areas for dog walking</b></p> <p>(a) Specific areas for dog walking.</p> <p>(b) More signage highlighting areas for dog walking.</p> <p>(c) Encourage owners to 'clean-up' after their dogs</p>

It is well documented that people from Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic backgrounds and/or those from deprived backgrounds are less engaged with nature and the landscape<sup>1</sup>.

## 3 Background

It is well documented that people from Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic backgrounds and/or those from deprived backgrounds are less engaged with nature and the landscape,<sup>1</sup> less likely to access the outdoors<sup>2</sup> and more likely to be physically inactive.<sup>3</sup> Dashper and King (2021) argue that 'the outdoors' 'is a contested leisure terrain that is both a space for freedom, relaxation and enjoyment, and, at the same time, a site of exclusion, hierarchy and discrimination' (p. 1). The COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated these divisions as outdoor activity became increasingly important.<sup>4</sup> Literature also suggests that the natural environment has the potential to improve physical and mental health<sup>5</sup>, which in turn can lead to reduced mortality.<sup>6</sup> UK Health Security Agency (formerly Public Health England) estimates increasing physical activity could save £2.1 billion in health costs if everyone had equal access to greenspaces.<sup>7</sup>

Nevertheless, not everyone can access the benefits of the outdoors and there are disparities in access to and use of the outdoors.<sup>8</sup> People from lower socio-economic groups,<sup>9</sup> people from Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic

backgrounds, women, the elderly and disabled are less likely to access greenspaces.<sup>10 11 12</sup> In their evidence synthesis for engaging under-represented groups in nature Rishbeth et al., (2022) categorised barriers experienced by older people, people living in low income areas, peoples from ethnic minorities and those living with disabilities to accessing greenspaces and the countryside under four main themes; *structural, experiential, cultural and planning, and design and management of the natural environment*.

Structural barriers are identified as a lack of nearby public green and bluespace (water environments), lack of quality in nearby public green and bluespace, lack of transport and costs involved in accessing more distant green and bluespace.

Experiential factors include concerns about security, safety and harm, including anxiety about antisocial behaviour, racism and hate crime, lack of information, getting lost, whether there will be enough to do and negative memories associated with greenspaces.

Cultural barriers are identified as cultural exclusion and lack of visibility of black and ethnic minority groups, disabled people and people from lower socio-economic groups. Barriers relating to the planning, design and management of natural environments are summarised as transport, costs, lack of time, and proximity of greenspaces to living areas, lack of knowledge about how to use nature spaces, worries about facilities such as toilets, cafes, information points and signposted walks. They also highlight evidence that under-represented groups are less likely to have a voice in local governance structures when compared to their White counterparts.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Natural England. (2020) The People and Nature Survey for England: Adult data Y1Q1 (April-June 2020) (Experimental Statistics). Retrieved from <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/the-people-and-nature-survey-for-england-adult-data-y1q1-april-june-2020-experimental-statistics>

<sup>11</sup> Corazon, S. S., Gramkow, M. C., Poulsen, D. V., Lygum, V. L., Zhang, G., & Stigsdotter, U. K. (2019) I Would Really like to Visit the Forest, but it is Just Too Difficult: A Qualitative Study on Mobility Disability and Green Spaces. *Scandinavian Journal of Disability Research*, 21(1).

<sup>12</sup> Morris, J., O'Brien, E., Ambrose-Oji, B., Lawrence, A., Carter, C., & Peace, A. (2011) Access for all? Barriers to accessing woodlands and forests in Britain. *Local Environment*, 16(4), 375-396.

<sup>13</sup> Rishbeth, C., Neal, S., French, M., & Snaith, B. (2022) Included outside: Evidence synthesis for engaging under-represented groups in nature (p. 27) [Summary Report]. Natural England. Available at: <https://publications.naturalengland.org.uk/publication/4918418548719616>



### Selecting Luton and Dunstable as the research site:

Luton and Dunstable are surrounded by the Chilterns chalk hills with bustling urban communities with access to greenspaces and countryside on their doorstep. The towns also have high levels of diversity and deprivation. These characteristics made them an ideal location to understand what makes under-represented groups connect or disconnect from greenspace and the Chilterns countryside.

Luton is a super diverse town with a population of 225,261 with a 54.8% non-white majority in the town (combined). The largest ethnic group is Asian, Asian British 83,325 (37.0%).<sup>14</sup> The black ethnic group is now 22,735 and make up 14.2% of the population of Luton. The Other white category, which includes people from Eastern Europe, is now

<sup>14</sup> Asian, Asian British includes Bangladeshi, Chinese, Indian, Pakistani and Other Asian groups.

7,800 (3.5%), an increase driven by Romanian migration to the town.<sup>15</sup> Luton also has five of the most deprived wards in the UK (Northwell, Leagrave, Biscot, Dallow, Saints and South) and these wards are also the most ethnically diverse. Dunstable has a population of 40,627 with a majority white population of 34,135 (84%), South Asian population of 2,569 (6.3%), the black ethnic group is 1,919 (4.7%), mixed heritage backgrounds are 1,441 (3.5%) and other ethnic groups are 468 (1.2%). Data also indicate that Dunstable Downs (covering most of the Downside estate) is the second most deprived area in Central Bedfordshire and is in the worst 10% in the East of England. Northfields is the sixth most deprived area in Central Bedfordshire and is in the worst 10-20% in the East of England.<sup>16</sup>

<sup>15</sup> [https://www.luton.gov.uk/Community\\_and\\_living/Lists/Luton/Documents/PDF/observatory/2021-census-national-identity.pdf](https://www.luton.gov.uk/Community_and_living/Lists/Luton/Documents/PDF/observatory/2021-census-national-identity.pdf)

<sup>16</sup> [https://www.centralbedfordshire.gov.uk/info/27/about\\_your\\_council/180/statistics\\_and\\_census\\_information/2](https://www.centralbedfordshire.gov.uk/info/27/about_your_council/180/statistics_and_census_information/2)

## 4 Methodology

We used a mixed methods approach to engage with diverse groups living in Luton and Dunstable:

- Focus group discussions with people from Pakistani, Bangladeshi, Indian, black African, black Caribbean, Polish, Romanian, Roma Gypsy Travellers, white Irish and white British communities living in Luton and Dunstable;
- One to one interviews with representatives from community organisations in Luton and Dunstable who worked with our communities of interest;
- An online community survey was developed using Luton and Dunstable residents.

The focus group discussions and interviews produced detailed in-depth descriptive information and the community survey generated a large amount of generalisable data in a short period.

We used our Talk, Listen, Change (TLC) ethnographic approach to engage with our communities of interest.<sup>17</sup> This approach focusses on ensuring we represent ethnic, age, gender, linguistic, national and social class differences and include the lesser heard voices (Ali, et al., 2021). These are the communities within communities that may be less visible in local and national data because they do not self-identify with the Office of National Statistics (ONS) ethnic categories. We were as specific as possible when engaging with our communities, recognising ethno-national, religious and linguistic communities to avoid generalising or homogenising experience. Our approach captures people who have poor English language fluency or are unlikely to engage due to cultural and/or religious reasons, e.g people from the 'Pakistani' community who may identify themselves as Kashmiri.<sup>18</sup> These settlers originate from Azad Kashmir but hold Pakistani passports because Kashmir is a disputed territory between India and Pakistan.<sup>19</sup> We also accounted for the growing number of settlers from Africa, Afghanistan, Romania and Albania now living in Luton.<sup>20</sup>

<sup>17</sup> [https://www.luton.gov.uk/Health\\_and\\_social\\_care/coronavirus/Lists/Luton/Documents/TLC-executive-summary.pdf](https://www.luton.gov.uk/Health_and_social_care/coronavirus/Lists/Luton/Documents/TLC-executive-summary.pdf) ethnographic approach.

<sup>18</sup> Ali, N. (2009) The making of Kashmiri identity, *South Asian Diaspora*, 1(2), pp. 181-192. <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/19438190903109545>

<sup>19</sup> Ali, N. (2003) Diaspora and nation: displacement and the politics of Kashmiri identity in Britain, *Contemporary South Asia*, 12(4), pp. 471-480. <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/0958493042000194318>

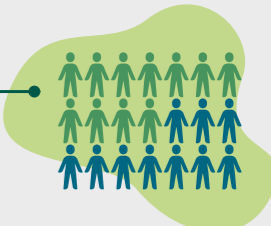
<sup>20</sup> [https://www.luton.gov.uk/Community\\_and\\_living/Lists/Luton/Documents/PDF/observatory/2021-census-national-identity.pdf](https://www.luton.gov.uk/Community_and_living/Lists/Luton/Documents/PDF/observatory/2021-census-national-identity.pdf)

## What did we do?

We used a mixed methods approach to carry out the research. The project included:

### 112 Participants

14 focus groups, totalling 112 participants from our communities of interest



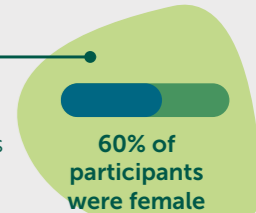
### 9 Interviews

9 interviews with community organisation representatives who could represent our focussed community views



### 906 Questionnaires

906 people completed our community survey – 60% were female and participants were aged between 16 and 94 (avg. of 38 years)



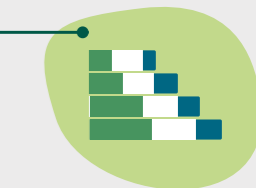
### Our communities

Our communities of interest were people who self-identify as Pakistani, Bangladeshi, Indian, black African, black Caribbean, Polish, Romanian, Roma Gypsy Travellers, white Irish and white British communities and reflected, self-ascribed identities, generational, gender, linguistic, national and social class differences



### Where and when

Data collection was carried out between March and September 2022 and focus group discussions and interviews were conducted face-to-face or using Zoom



### Supporting details

Ethical approval was obtained from the University of Bedfordshire (UoB) Ethics Committee



We used a purposive<sup>21</sup> approach to recruiting people for the focus groups and interviews. We wanted to avoid recruiting the 'usual suspects' and reached out to people whose voices are seldom heard. Our TLC Community Researchers were essential to the success of our approach to engaging our communities of interest because:

- They were able to **access lesser heard voices**: because they were bilingual, male and female, from Luton and from the religious, cultural, linguistic backgrounds of our communities of interest. Thus, they were able to remove barriers because they had privileged access to people who might otherwise be unwilling to talk to conventional researchers. They were able to use their networks and trusted relationships to involve the 'hard to reach', 'lesser heard' or 'easy to ignore' members of our selected communities.
- They were able to **empower participants**: because they were from the same backgrounds and thus limited the power imbalance between professional researchers and participants.
- During data collection, they brought with them their own **lived experiences**, which created trust and enriched discussions.
- Therefore, they were able to **gather better data** because they had experience in common. Consequently, discussions were more informal and open, and this approach generated rich, in-depth contextualised information.
- Our approach meant that our selected communities were **activated** to be more self-critical and open to sharing ideas to improve their own wellbeing through accessing greenspaces and the countryside.

<sup>21</sup> Purposive sampling refers to prospective study participants being selected based on the particular objectives (or purpose) of the study. The characteristic of the sample should enable the objectives of the study to be met (Ritchie & Lewis, 2012).



We developed project branding to increase the visibility and confidence in the project in Luton and Dunstable and help with the recruitment and engagement of members of our selected communities. This strengthened participation and the trust of our communities in the project.

The online version of the community survey generated 233 completed questionnaires. To boost our sample, the TLC Community Researchers recruited participants purposively to complete a paper copy of the community survey. Where people had poor English fluency, they were able to complete an interviewer administered questionnaire. Using these combined methods 906 questionnaires were completed.

## 5 Results

The focus group discussions and interviews were audio-recorded, transcribed and translated as necessary. We used the Framework Approach<sup>22</sup> to analyse the focus group discussions and the interviews, and the data from the community survey were analysed to provide descriptive and comparative statistics.<sup>23</sup> The online text comments on the community survey were analysed using qualitative content analysis.<sup>24</sup>

- <sup>22</sup> A thematic Framework Analysis approach was used to analyse the data (Ritchie, Spencer & O'Connor. (2003) Carrying out qualitative analysis. Qualitative research practice: A guide for social science students and researchers, 2003, 219-62.). This involved a detailed familiarisation of the data, identification of the key themes to form a coding frame, indexing the material according to the coding frame, and interpreting the findings in the context of other research and policy and practice considerations.
- <sup>23</sup> <https://www.qualtrics.com/uk/experience-management/research/descriptive-statistics/>
- <sup>24</sup> Kansteiner, K., & König, S. (2020) The Role(s) of Qualitative Content Analysis in Mixed Methods Research Designs in *Forum: Qualitative Social Research*, Volume 21, No. 1, Art. 11.

The views from the focus group, interviews and the community survey are presented thematically in line with the objectives of the project in the following sections. Where relevant we have presented similarities and differences by ethnicity and religion, age, gender and levels of deprivation.

The objectives for the research were to:

- Ascertain the **current level of engagement** with greenspaces and the countryside;
- Understand the **barriers and enablers for accessing greenspaces and the countryside**;
- **Co-create sustainable, scalable activities** which overcome the identified issues/barriers.



## Engagement with greenspaces and the countryside

### Types of greenspaces and the countryside used regularly

- The majority of participants regardless of ethnicity said that they regularly use parks that were closest to where they live such as Wardown Park, Stockwood Park and Brantwood Park.
- Some participants explained that they used parks closest to where they lived because this was convenient.
- A minority of our participants said that they regularly use the countryside and mentioned visiting Dunstable Downs, Barton Hills, Warden Hills and Icknield Hills.

*Wigmore is next door to me. I've got a couple of greenspaces, kind of little parks near me.*  
(white British female)\*

\* Codes on quotes: P refers to participant number and FG refers to Focus Group. Quotes from community organisation representative indicated by their professional role.

*Only the near ones actually, like say Wardown Park, Stockwood Park, we don't really have a variety of greenery or open space.*  
(Bangladeshi female)

## Reasons for visiting greenspaces and the countryside

### Improving and maintaining of physical and mental health

- The majority of our participants regardless of ethnicity were aware of the benefits of using greenspaces for improving and maintaining good physical and mental health.
- Some participants regardless of ethnicity said they used local parks for sports activities.

*...for me most of the greenspaces, I've only used them for sports really. Obviously when we were younger we used to go out as a family. We used to go to Dunstable Downs, sometimes go to Stockwood Park.*

(Bangladeshi male, P1, FG3)

- The majority of our Pakistani and Bangladeshi female participants did not discuss participating in sports activities as a reason for visiting greenspaces or the countryside.

### Socialising with family and friends

- The majority of our participants regardless of ethnicity discussed using greenspaces for socialising with family and friends.

### Educational purposes

- Some participants regardless of ethnicity discussed the importance of greenspaces and the countryside for educating children about nature and history and helping them connect with nature and wildlife.

### Religious reasons

- Christian and Muslim participants discussed the importance of greenspaces for helping their communities to connect with God/Allah through his creation and meditation.

*I am a Christian and there was one church I used to go to and they used to use a park to do a picnic and Christian things to bring everyone together to have fun.*

(black African male, P4, FG9)

### Time spent when visiting greenspaces

- The time spent in greenspaces and the countryside varied from several hours to 35 minutes a day.
- Participants explained that the time spent using greenspaces or the countryside was dependant on the distance from home.

### What our community survey said:

#### Q1

##### How often do you visit greenspaces?

- Participants aged 16-50 used greenspaces significantly more than their older counterparts did.
- Bangladeshi and black Caribbean participants used green spaces significantly less when compared to all other ethnic groups.
- Muslims were shown to have the lowest use of greenspaces, significantly less than participants who self-identified as Christian, Hindu, or Sikh.
- Participants who stated that they had a disability were significantly less likely to use greenspaces.
- Gender and deprivation had no direct impact on the use of greenspaces.

#### Q2

##### How important is it for you to use greenspaces?

- Participants who were from more deprived communities were significantly less likely to view greenspaces as important compared to those from more affluent neighbourhoods.
- Pakistani and black African participants viewed greenspaces as significantly less important when compared to white British and Indian participants.

#### Q3-Q7

##### Please list the greenspaces you visit regularly

- Hindu participants viewed greenspaces as the most important and significantly more important compared to those who self-identified as Christian or Muslim.
- Age, gender, and disability status had no direct impact on the perceived importance of using greenspaces.

#### Q8

##### How familiar are you with greenspaces around where you live?

- Younger participants (aged 16-30 years) were significantly more aware of greenspaces around them compared to older participants.
- Participants who were from more deprived communities were significantly less likely to be aware of greenspaces around them compared to those from more affluent neighbourhoods.
- White British and Indian participants were significantly more likely to be aware of greenspaces when compared to Bangladeshi, Pakistani, black African and white 'other' participants.
- Hindu participants were significantly more aware of greenspaces around them compared to those who self-identified as Muslim.
- Participants who had a disability were shown to be less aware of greenspaces around them compared to those with no disclosed disability.

#### Q9

##### How did you find out about the greenspaces you use?

- Most participants disclosed that they found out through friends (68.3%) and family (56.6%). Social media (25.7%) and the use of the internet (26.8%) were also shown to be important sources of information.

#### Q10

##### How often do you use greenspaces for any of the following reasons?

- Participants were asked to what extent they use greenspaces (1) to socialise with family, (2) to socialise with friends, (3) as part of their work and employment, e.g. for meetings, (4) as part of social/community group meetups, and finally (5) as part of social/religious group meetups. Responses for each reason were recorded on a scale of 0 (never) to 10 (always). The most common reason for participants to use greenspaces was 'to socialise with friends', with a mean score of 5.7, closely followed by 'to socialise with family', with a mean score of 5.4. Using greenspaces as part of their work was considered the least common reason with a mean score of 1.7.





### Enablers for accessing greenspaces and the countryside

#### 'Where to go': Finding out about greenspaces and the countryside

- A minority of our participants said they found out about the greenspaces through curiosity, word of mouth, through websites, social media and mobile apps.
- One participant discussed finding out about greenspaces through local council directory information either online or by visiting them.
- One participant said he found out about available greenspaces through the University of Bedfordshire Student Union.

#### 'When to go': The weather

- The majority of our participants regardless of ethnicity or gender, considered the weather to be a significant factor in using greenspaces and the countryside. They explained that they were more likely to visit greenspaces and the countryside during the spring and summer months.

#### 'When to go': The impact of the COVID-19 lockdowns

- Some participants discussed that the COVID-19 lockdowns played a significant part in their increased use of greenspaces and the countryside because they had more time, and they needed to 'get out of the house with children' and exercise.

*...but I think during the pandemic, because there was nothing else to do, there was nowhere to take the kids, I started a lot more walks. I think a lot of people were a lot more active.*

(Pakistani female, P1, FG2)

- Some participants said that once the COVID-19 lockdowns were lifted, they stopped going out for walks.
- Some community organisation representatives said that there was still anxiety about the transmission of COVID-19, which deterred people from visiting greenspaces, and the countryside. They explained that they stopped organising activities in greenspaces during the COVID-19 pandemic.

#### 'Who to go with': Family and peer support

- Some participants regardless of ethnicity said that it was easier for them to use greenspaces and the countryside when they had a family member or friend to go with as this helped with their motivation levels to 'get out'.
- Community organisation representatives also said that it was easier for people to visit greenspaces and the countryside if they had a family member or a friend to go with.
- Some participants who were born overseas discussed that greenspaces and the countryside reminded them of being in their birth/home countries and the similarities.

#### 'When you get there': The availability of facilities

- Some participants, regardless of ethnicity, explained that accessing greenspaces and the countryside where facilities such as toilets, benches, cafeteria, play facilities for children, wheelchair accessibility and parking were available, were easier for them to visit.

*...I'd rather drive up to somewhere like Stockwood Park than go to Wardown Park because Wardown Park, the facilities especially things like toilet facilities are not very good there. We'll go somewhere like Stockwood Park, you can go into the Discovery Centre, and the facilities are clean and better. So, things like that do play a part in terms of where to go.*

(Pakistani male, P6, FG1)

#### 'When you get there': Security and feeling safe

- Some participants, regardless of ethnicity, said that they preferred to visit greenspaces and the countryside which were patrolled by wardens or security persons because this made them 'feel safe'.

#### 'When you get there': The attractiveness of the greenspaces/the countryside

- Some participants, regardless of ethnicity, said that they visit some greenspaces and the countryside because they enjoy being close to nature and in particular seeing greenery, flowers and animals.



### Barriers to accessing greenspaces and the countryside

#### 'Where to go': The availability of information

- The majority of our participants explained that limited awareness of 'where to go' was a significant barrier to using greenspaces and the countryside.

*I don't even know these places, so can't go, and also I feel scared to drive that far. I can't drive long distances. Above all, I do not even know these places. So how can I go?*

(Bangladeshi female, P3, FG4)

*I only know about the park with the ducks (Wardown Park).*

(Romanian female, P2, FG6)

#### 'No time to go': Lack of time

- The majority of our participants, regardless of ethnicity, discussed the lack of time as a barrier to accessing greenspaces and the countryside. For many, the priority was to work, earn money and look after children and families.
- Some of our Pakistani participants explained that when growing up they had little experience of visiting greenspaces or the countryside. Parents had recently migrated to Luton and their priorities were to work, house and feed families here and 'back home'.
- For other participants, regardless of ethnicity, their caring roles were reported as a barrier to accessing greenspaces and the countryside.

#### 'How to get there': Transport issues

- A majority of the participants, regardless of ethnicity, said that transport issues were a barrier to visiting greenspaces but especially the countryside. They were enthusiastic about visiting the countryside but explained that this was impossible without transport.

*To be honest, I like the countryside, but I don't drive, so I don't get to go to the countryside very often, but love the countryside.*

(black Caribbean female, P1, FG11)

- Some participants explained that the cost of public transport and petrol costs was a barrier.

#### 'When you get there': Inadequate facilities and overcrowding

- The majority of our participants, regardless of ethnicity, discussed that the lack of facilities such as toilets, benches, restaurants, parking, facilities for people with disabilities, sheltered areas for children 'in case it rains' are a barrier to visiting greenspaces and the countryside.
- Some participants, regardless of ethnicity, went on to explain that sometimes the play areas in the greenspaces have a very long queue of children just waiting for their turn to use the swings due to limited facilities.
- Discussion also focussed on the lack of facilities for those with disabilities.

*Even visually impaired people...where do they go? ...for them, again its sensory, the need to touch, be able to touch and stuff like that. I don't feel like there's enough.*

(Bangladeshi female, P7, FG4)

- A minority of participants, regardless of ethnicity, said that some greenspaces are overcrowded which deters them from visiting them.

#### 'When you get there': Safety issues and antisocial behaviour

- Many of our participants, regardless of ethnicity, discussed the lack of safety and antisocial behaviours as a barrier to accessing greenspaces and the countryside.

*Even as a man, you do (referring to fearing to go to greenspaces at night).*

(Romanian male, P5, FG6)

- Participants, regardless of ethnicity, also explained that they were aware of or had witnessed gang culture and drug dealing taking place in Luton parks and that this was a serious concern.
- For some of our Muslim participants, overt displays of a sexual nature in Luton parks were against their cultural and religious values and therefore unacceptable. This prevented them from taking children to parks in Luton.



#### 'When you get there': The experience of racism and discrimination

- Some Pakistani, Bangladeshi and African participants said that racism was a barrier to visiting greenspaces. They explained that racism in greenspaces and the countryside was felt more than it was seen.

*More than see it (racism) you feel it... you go there... looks... Nobody's blatantly saying [anything] to you but as I said you can feel it, you can sense it, that you are not really wanted here.*

(Pakistani male, P2, FG1)

- Muslim participants felt that their dress i.e. *hijab* (headscarf), *abbya* (a full length outer garment) and the *niqab* (veil) made them a target for Islamophobic verbal and physical attacks.

*I think if they are covering, they may fear about being attacked and stuff.*

(Pakistani female, P4, FG2)

*...even myself when I do go out of town... I do feel a little bit nervous. Especially the way that I dress, you know, I do feel nervous, people look at you...*

(Pakistani female, P2, FG3)

*They only do that (letting their dogs loose) because they know that our [Muslim] people are scared of dogs...*

(Pakistani male, P6, FG1)

- One Bangladeshi woman discussed discrimination against children with 'visible disabilities'.

#### 'When you get there': Poor maintenance

- The majority of the participants, regardless of ethnicity, said that many greenspaces and the countryside are not properly maintained which prevents them from visiting them.
- Some of our participants, regardless of ethnicity, were concerned about diminishing greenspaces in Luton due to the construction of housing.

*Like the town [Luton] is becoming a concrete jungle. The town itself is disappearing. So where are the children going to go? So how are they going to get facilities for children to be able to go to greenspaces?*

(Trustee white Irish community)



### 'When you get there': Fear of unleashed dogs

- Some participants regardless of ethnicity added that the fear of unleashed dogs was a barrier to people visiting greenspaces and the countryside.

...we used to spend a lot of time using them [Luton greenspaces], because my son loves planes. We used to go to our local greenspace, it's not a park, just an open green grass area with lots of trees where you can see the planes landing and taking off. We spent hours there until people come with different dog breeds and one time we were attacked. My son was so terrified that he will not go to this greenspace anymore.

(Polish female, P4, FG7)

### Our community survey indicated that:

#### Q11

#### What prevents you and makes it easier for you to use greenspaces?

- Participants were provided a list of pre-defined benefits and asked how much each influenced their use of greenspaces. Responses were recorded on a five-point Likert scale ranging from (1) 'strongly disagree' to (5) 'strongly agree'. The most influential reasons centred on participants' health and wellbeing, which included 'to make me feel happy', 'to improve my mood', and 'to help me feel less stressed', all with a mean score of 4.3, closely followed by 'to improve my physical health' with a mean score of 4.2. The least influential reason was for 'religious and spiritual wellbeing', which had a mean score of 3.6.

#### Physical capability

'I have the physical capability to access and use greenspaces'.

#### What is physical capability?

'Having the physical skills, strength, or stamina to use greenspaces (e.g. I have sufficient physical ability and skills; I can overcome disability to use greenspaces)'.

- Older participants (aged 51 years+) had significantly lower levels of perceived physical capability compared to their younger counterparts.
- White British and white 'other' ethnic groups had the highest level of perceived physical capability, and significantly higher when compared to Indian, Pakistani, Bangladeshi, Asian other and black Caribbean ethnic groups.
- Muslim participants had significantly lower levels of perceived physical capability when compared to those with no religion or were Christian.
- Participants who disclosed they had a disability and/or cared for someone with a disability had significantly lower level of perceived physical capability compared to those who did not.

#### Psychological capability

'I have the psychological capability to access and use greenspaces'.

#### What is psychological capability?

'Knowledge, interpersonal (communication) skills, and/or headspace to use greenspaces, e.g. I have the knowledge of how and where to access the local greenspaces, I have the attention, focus, ability to make a decision and/or memory to use the local outdoor greenspaces'.

- Older participants (aged 65 years+), regardless of ethnicity and gender, had lower levels of perceived psychological capability to use greenspaces, significantly lower when compared to all other age groups.
- White British participants had the highest level of perceived psychological capability, which was significantly higher when compared to white 'other', Pakistani, and Bangladeshi ethnic groups.
- Muslim participants had significantly lower levels of perceived physical capability when compared to those who were Christian.
- Participants from the most deprived neighbourhoods were shown to have the lowest levels of psychological capability, and these were significantly lower than their more affluent counterparts.
- Participants who disclosed they had a disability and/or cared for someone with a disability had a significantly lower level of perceived psychological capability, compared to those who did not.
- No significant differences were found between gender and perceived levels of psychological capability to use greenspaces.

#### Physical opportunity

'I have the physical opportunity to access and use greenspaces'.

#### What is physical opportunity?

'The environment that helps me to access and use greenspaces, e.g. I have sufficient time, resources, and access to greenspaces around me'.

- Older participants (aged 65 years+), regardless of ethnicity and gender, had significantly less physical opportunity to use greenspaces compared to their younger participants.
- Participants from the most deprived neighbourhoods had significantly less physical opportunity to access greenspaces.
- White British participants had the highest physical opportunity, significantly higher compared to white 'other', Pakistani, black African and Asian 'other' ethnic groups.
- Regardless of ethnicity and gender those with a disability or caring for someone with a disability had significantly lower levels of physical opportunity to use greenspaces.



### Social opportunity

'I have the social opportunity to access and use greenspaces'.

#### What is social opportunity?

'Support from friends, family, and other people, and how my culture and religion might influence the use of the greenspaces, e.g. I have support from people around me to use the local greenspaces'.

- Older participants (aged 50 years+), regardless of ethnicity and gender, had lower levels of social opportunity to use greenspaces, which were significantly lower when compared to their younger counterparts.
- Females reported significantly higher levels of social opportunity compared to males.
- White British participants had the highest level of perceived social opportunity, and this was significantly higher when compared to white 'other' and Asian 'other' ethnic groups.
- Participants who disclosed they had a disability had significantly lower level of perceived social opportunity when compared to those who did not.
- No significant differences were found between deprivation level, religion or caring for someone with a disability and having the social opportunity to use greenspaces.

### Reflective motivation

'I am motivated to use greenspaces'.

#### What is reflective motivation?

'Wanting and planning to use the green spaces, believing you are capable of using greenspaces and thinking that this is a good idea (e.g. I have the desire to, I want to, I feel the need to, I think it will lead to a good outcome, I can use the local greenspaces)'.

- Older participants (aged 65 years+) had lower levels of reflective motivation, which were significantly lower when compared to their younger counterparts.
- Indian participants had the highest level of perceived reflective motivation, and this was significantly higher when compared to Pakistani ethnic groups.
- Participants who disclosed they had a disability had significantly lower levels of reflective motivation to use greenspaces when compared to those who did not.
- No significant differences were found between gender, deprivation level, religion or caring for someone with a disability and having the reflective motivation to use greenspaces.

### Automatic motivation

'Using greenspaces is something that I do routinely'.

#### What is automatic motivation?

'Involves doing something without thinking or having to remember (e.g. using greenspaces is something I do before I realise, I'm doing it, it is part of my routine)'.

- White British and Indian participants had the highest level of perceived automatic motivation, significantly higher when compared to white 'other', Pakistani, Asian 'other' and black African ethnic groups.
- No significant differences were found between age, gender, deprivation level, religion, disability status or caring for someone with a disability and having the reflective motivation to use greenspaces.



### Q12

What motivates you to use greenspaces? We asked participants to indicate what factors influenced their use of greenspaces (M=mean; SD=standard deviation).

- The most influential reasons centred on participants' health and wellbeing which included; to make me feel happy (M=4.33; SD=1.03), to improve my mood (M=4.32; SD=1.03), to help me feel less stressed (M=4.31; SD=1.07), and to improve my physical health (M=4.24; SD=1.10).
- The least influential factors were religious and spiritual wellbeing (M=3.58; SD=1.33).

### Q13

Which of the following affects you attending and using greenspaces?

- Females, those from more deprived neighbourhoods, alongside those from Pakistani/Bangladeshi and white 'other' ethnic groups, were significantly more likely to cite factors related to community safety and accessibility as barriers to using greenspaces.
- Older residents, females, those from Pakistani/Bangladeshi ethnic groups and those who have a disclosed disability were significantly more likely to cite social barriers to using greenspaces.
- Females, those aged 41-50 years and white other and Pakistani/Bangladeshi ethnic groups, were significantly more likely to face environmental barriers in accessing greenspaces.

### What motivates you to use greenspaces?

To make me feel happy (average 4.33)



To improve my mood (average 4.32)



To help me feel less stressed (average 4.31)



To improve my physical health (average 4.24)



Religious and spiritual wellbeing (average 3.58)



### Creating awareness about greenspaces and the countryside

- There was a consensus among participants that a priority strategy for improving access to greenspaces and the countryside is creating awareness among communities.

*I think awareness... most of the people go to the Mosque where there's a bigger gathering, especially on Jumma (Friday prayers). If we can slowly, slowly introduce and make people aware... It's just awareness.*

(Bangladeshi male, P3, FG3)

*...the beauty of Bedfordshire needs to be highlighted, the benefits also of going out and using these spaces.*

(Caribbean male Pastor)

*It's very important that in conversation to say have you ever decided, you know, thought of going for walks daily even if you start off with half an hour.*

(Pakistani female community worker)

- Participants argued that communities were not knowledgeable about the availability, location, transport, cost and facilities available in local greenspaces and the countryside. They suggested that more information should be disseminated through community and religious organisations.
- The majority of participants suggested information in the form of posters and leaflets about greenspaces and the countryside should be available at community, religious and other frequently visited public spaces. Cinemas, shopping centres and the back of buses were given as examples.

*...big information panels put around town, with whatever place, what bus or transportation is available to get there, the times between the traveling takes place, how much it costs...*

(Romanian female, P8, FG6)

- The majority of our participants suggested that this information about greenspaces should be available in English and community languages representing Luton's linguistic diversity.

*...so it needs to be in their community languages. So there's some people that don't speak English or they aren't able to read English.*

(Pakistani female community worker)

- Some participants, regardless of ethnicity, also suggested that information about greenspaces and the countryside should be disseminated through local community radio stations radios such as Inspire FM.
- A Bangladeshi female and black African male discussed that the children in schools should also be taught about the benefits of accessing nature in greenspaces and the countryside. They went on to explain that if information is given to schools, children and young people would be able pass on information and encourage parents to visit greenspaces and the countryside.
- Participants, regardless of ethnicity, explained that social media was a 'good way to promote greenspaces and the countryside' and using influencers and/or celebrity promoters would generate interest.

#### Providing essential facilities, ensuring confidence about health and safety in greenspaces and the countryside

- Participants, regardless of ethnicity and gender, were keen to point out that there was a need to provide information about the facilities such as toilets, restaurants, benches and children's play areas available in greenspaces and the countryside to encourage visits.
- One Romanian female said that there should be designated sunbathing spots in the greenspaces and the countryside.
- Some participants, regardless of ethnicity, said that there needs to be improved security in the greenspaces and the countryside.



#### Organising trips to greenspaces and the countryside

- Participants, regardless of ethnicity, explained that they knew members of their communities who were unable to 'get out' to greenspaces and the countryside because they lived alone; did not have the confidence to go out alone and they were elderly and/or in poor health. They did not have personal transport; were not familiar with using public transport; could not afford petrol or transport costs or were not permitted to access greenspaces or the countryside alone by partners and family for cultural reasons and had concerns over safety. Consequently, discussions centred on the need for organised trips to greenspaces and the countryside for vulnerable and marginalised members of the community.

*I was saying that they can't go anywhere alone. So, I think if there was a community organisation...that say we'll take you out in the mornings.*

(Bangladeshi female, P7, FG4)



...or a group transport, where there's a pickup time, and the coach takes x number of people to the greenspace and drives them back.

Superb.

(Polish female, P6, FG7)



- Some participants, regardless of ethnicity, discussed the importance of organising culturally appropriate events in greenspaces and the countryside such as music events, plays and Urdu poetry to increase the use of greenspaces and the countryside.

...even to have a show in open space. It would be really beautiful to take the children, when they have a couple of free days, when they get out of school. To have... poetry shows maybe, to get out of the routine... to have some fun. It would be good for the children.

(Romanian female, P1, FG6)



- Participants provided solutions for the lack of availability of personal transport, lack of familiarity with using public transport, and cost/affordability of petrol or transport costs in the context of organised trips as well.

...they should take the old people and go in the countryside by coach... give them a chance to see the countryside and its good [for] their health...

(Pakistani male, P3, FG1)



#### Maintenance and cleanliness of the greenspaces and the countryside

- There was a consensus among participants that greenspaces need to be clean and well maintained to encourage more people to use them.
- Some participants regardless of ethnicity suggested that dog owners should be especially encouraged to 'clean-up' after their dogs.
- Provide more signage highlighting cleanliness would be helpful and alcohol should be prohibited in parks in Luton.

#### Working together as a community to promote the use of greenspaces and the countryside

- The majority of our participants, regardless of ethnicity, said that community and religious organisations could work with communities to give information and organise trips to visit greenspaces and the countryside.

I mean obviously, as a charity we deliver projects if we get the funding. So funding is our main issue.

(Pakistani male)



- One participant said that communities need to be more vocal and articulate their views regarding their concerns about greenspaces and the countryside to ensure Luton Borough Council can address issues.



## 6 Conclusions and next steps

The views of our communities are similar to existing research on access of under-represented groups in the countryside (Rishbeth et al., 2022). Our communities were more likely to access local greenspaces than the countryside and were aware of the benefits of greenspaces for improving and maintaining good physical and mental health and wellbeing. We identified many barriers, which ranged from a lack of information and awareness of greenspaces and the countryside, lack of time, the availability and cost of transport, lack of facilities such as toilets, benches, restaurants, parking and facilities for people with disabilities, poor maintenance of facilities, safety issues and antisocial behaviour, racism and discrimination, and fear of unleashed dogs. Enablers included the availability of information online, such as on Luton Council's website, or from the University of Bedfordshire's Student Union. Good weather during spring and summer was an incentive for people to use greenspaces and the countryside. The COVID-19 lockdowns also played a significant role in increased use of greenspaces and the countryside.

Discussion with our communities highlighted the importance of creating awareness about greenspaces and the countryside through improved information and targeted interventions. Previous research has also highlighted the importance of increasing visits for under-represented groups and ensuring community involvement, co-design<sup>25</sup> and evaluating interventions to provide information on 'what works'.<sup>26</sup>

We recommend developing and delivering a collaborative-targeted outreach programme (CTOP) for improving access to greenspaces and the Chilterns countryside. The aim would be to deliver CTOP through a series of interventions co-designed with diverse communities, community and religious organisations and the Chilterns National Landscape, to increase access for under-represented groups to greenspaces and the Chilterns countryside. Co-production is a key policy imperative in the public sector and CTOP is a culturally competent approach at co-creating solutions.

<sup>25</sup> Ward, C., Palmer, A. K., Brockett, B. F. T., Costanza, R., Hatfield, J., Kubiszewski, I., Langford, P., Pickett, K., & Willis, C. (2023) Perceptions, preferences and barriers: A qualitative study of greenspace and under-representation in Leeds, UK. *People and Nature*. Available at: <https://besjournals.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1002/pan3.10507>

<sup>26</sup> Rishbeth, C., Neal, S., French, M., & Snaith, B. (2022) Included outside: Evidence synthesis for engaging under-represented groups in nature.

#### A Collaborative Targeted Outreach Programme (CTOP) would:

- Collaborate with communities to **increase** information and awareness about greenspaces and the countryside.
- Collaborate with communities to increase community **access** to the countryside by organising guided walks and countryside trips.
- Collaborate with communities to improve **representation** of diversity in publicity about greenspaces and the countryside to reduce discrimination.
- Evaluate** CTOP for access to greenspaces and the Chilterns countryside.

#### Why this work is important

This is the largest study of its kind carried out in England. It engaged diverse communities through a community survey and focus groups, which now enables us to work with those communities to co-create ways to improve access to greenspace and the Chilterns countryside.

#### Next steps

Our Pakistani and black Caribbean participants use greenspaces significantly less compared to Indian participants. Muslims had the lowest use of greenspaces, which was significantly less than participants who self-identified as Christian, Hindu, or Sikh. Our proposal is that we pilot CTOP for access to greenspaces and the Chilterns countryside with ethnically diverse Muslim communities in Luton and High Wycombe, where they are the largest ethnic group. The results can then be used to inform further CTOP approaches with other communities.



## 7 Acknowledgements

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**Thank you.**

## 8 Further reading and contact details

- Rishbeth, C., Neal, S., French, M., & Snaith, B. (2022) Included outside: Evidence synthesis for engaging under-represented groups in nature (p. 27) [Summary Report]. *Natural England*. Available at: <https://publications.naturalengland.org.uk/publication/4918418548719616>
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University of  
Bedfordshire

INSTITUTE FOR  
**HEALTH RESEARCH**

**Nasreen Ali**  
**Institute for Health Research**

University of Bedfordshire  
Room 32, Putteridge Bury,  
Hitchin Road, Luton,  
Bedfordshire LU2 8LE

[www.beds.ac.uk/ihr](http://www.beds.ac.uk/ihr)  
[nasreen.ali@beds.ac.uk](mailto:nasreen.ali@beds.ac.uk)



**Chilterns**  
**National**  
**Landscape**

**Elaine King**  
**Chilterns National Landscape**

90 Station Road  
Chinnor,  
Oxfordshire OX39 4HA

[www.chilterns.org.uk](http://www.chilterns.org.uk)  
[office@chilterns.org.uk](mailto:office@chilterns.org.uk)