

# Science for Environment Policy

## Local communities inform urban green space management

**A new tool** has been developed, with input from the public, to measure and compare the quality of green spaces in urban areas. A UK case study suggests that litter and vandalism are among the factors most likely to prevent local residents from using and benefiting from green spaces.

**Scientific research** has demonstrated how green and natural environments can play an important role in keeping communities healthy. The way people use green spaces in urban environments is thought to depend on their quality; improving quality can therefore potentially promote health, especially in deprived areas.

The study developed a simple tool, the Neighbourhood Green Space Tool (NGST), to characterise key features important to the public in urban green spaces. Using the public to inform the research is a method that the researchers believe can provide a meaningful in-the-field assessment of urban green space.

The research focused on 'neighbourhood' green spaces (i.e. areas that attract local people from a neighbouring area) in the city of Stoke-on-Trent, UK, which has a level of green areas above the national average. Focus groups were set up to record public opinion on the quality of local green space and its use. Themes explored included access, recreation facilities, amenities, natural features (i.e. trees, flowers) and 'incivilities', such as litter and vandalism. Street surveys and an online survey were also undertaken so people could rate the importance of different features of a green space and how this influenced their use of the space.

Focus groups discussions revealed the overall importance of green space and the preference for natural, rather than man-made, qualities of these areas. Lack of recreational facilities and antisocial behaviour, such as litter, evidence of alcohol use and vandalism, were the greatest barriers to people using green spaces in their neighbourhood.

A scoring system was developed from the surveys to rate the most attractive features of a green space, with each feature given a 'weighting'. The researchers then measured the quality of a green space through site visits by two independent assessors, who rated various characteristics, such as natural features, amenities, recreational facilities and incivilities. Weights were applied to different domain scores to provide a measure of quality.

Interestingly, incivilities, such as litter and dog mess, were consistently rated as the most important factor determining the use of a green space.

The NGST allowed a simple and reliable comparison of the quality of neighbourhood green spaces based on the views of the public. The results can be used by land planners to understand how areas are being used and which areas may need further improvement and investment.



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**Contact:**  
[c.gidlow@staffs.ac.uk](mailto:c.gidlow@staffs.ac.uk)

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