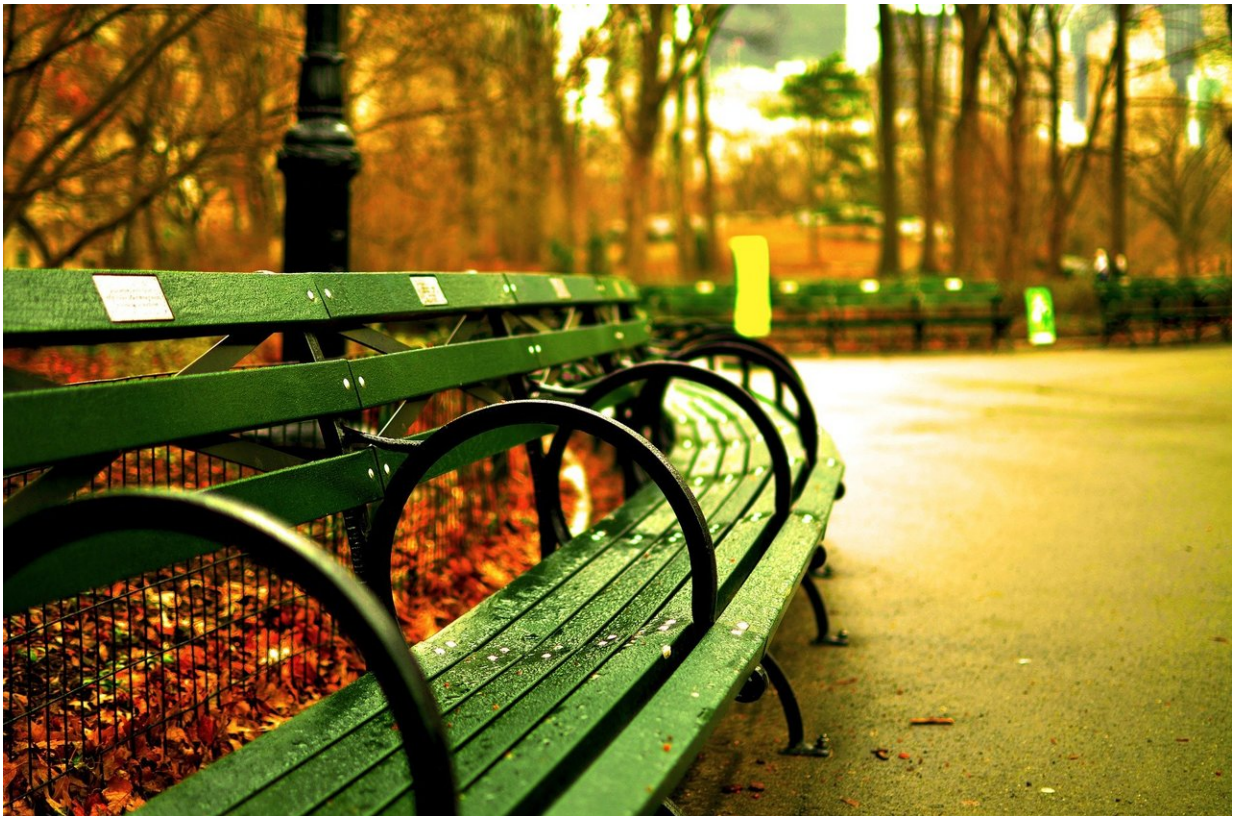


Invest in green space to boost wellbeing across cities, say researchers

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More funding should be made available to improve, maintain and encourage people to connect with green spaces in cities so residents can reap the health and wellbeing rewards they provide, according to

researchers at the University of Sheffield.

A project Improving Wellbeing through Urban Nature (IWUN) - by academics from the University of Sheffield's Department of Landscape Architecture - found that there is a measurable improvement in health and [wellbeing](#) when people notice the nature around them.

Researchers are calling on policymakers to invest in new and existing [green spaces](#) so they meet the diverse needs of urban populations and everyone can access their benefits.

Access to green spaces; quality of facilities – including toilets and cafes; frequency of maintenance; employment of staff and support for groups running organised activities are all vital for ensuring a city's green spaces support the wellbeing of its citizens equally.

As well as ensuring that parks are safe and welcoming places to visit, the project's recommendations are designed to encourage people and communities who would not normally use green spaces to connect with the natural environment.

Professor Anna Jorgensen, from the University's Department of Landscape Architecture, who led the IWUN project, said: "A city's network of parks and open spaces support mental wellbeing and [social inclusion](#). However, the wellbeing benefits of nature and green space may not always be available to support the people who need them most.

"To deliver equitable benefits, we need sustained investment in the everyday physical and social infrastructure of urban natural spaces."

The £1.3m IWUN project worked with planners, [health professionals](#) and community volunteers – and created a mobile phone app – to evaluate how the quality and quantity of urban green space in Sheffield

impacts on the health and wellbeing of the city's residents.

They found that poorer quality green spaces are stressful and intimidating, while health levels are worse in areas where the quality of green space is poor.

Professor Jorgensen said: "We have found that it is not enough just to calculate the amount of green space a person can access - quality and ease of access matter too.

"There is no generic template for a good [park](#) or green [space](#). But the connections between experiences of nature – including diverse trees, plants and wildlife – and mental wellbeing are strong and can provide a foundation for designing and managing public open spaces.

"A park that only serves as a children's playground or a football training ground is not fulfilling its potential."

She added: "Simple interventions - such as a café in a park or a pedestrian-friendly access route - can make green spaces welcoming and inclusive. Places to stop and sit, facilities such as toilets, members of staff who can create a sense of safety, and social activities that connect with vulnerable or isolated people can extend the wellbeing effects of green spaces to new people and groups."

Budgets for parks have been hit heavily by government cuts – 92 per cent of park managers reported cuts to their revenue in a 2016 report commissioned by the Heritage Lottery Fund – a six per cent rise from 2014.

The project's findings have wide ranging implications for policymaking.

"Planners and highways staff need to plan to maximise appreciation of

nature and encounters with the [natural world](#)," Professor Jorgensen added.

"They should incorporate and preserve views of hills, parks, woodlands and sky. Developers of residential or commercial buildings can enhance the public realm through planting and wildlife-friendly features, such as bird boxes.

"Mature trees must be preserved wherever possible. New developments should include gardens – especially ones that are visible from the street – and owners should be discouraged from paving over gardens and removing mature trees."

More information: For more information, see [iwun.uk/](#)

Provided by University of Sheffield

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