

Public willing to pay more for greener urban spaces

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Research from the University of Sheffield (UK) has found that people are willing to pay up to £29.91 per month, or around £360.00 per year, for greener urban spaces.

Researchers surveyed the public in the two major urban centres of Manchester and Sheffield to find out how much extra they were willing to pay in council tax or rent/mortgage payments for green spaces in their local area. They found that people were willing to pay more for greener spaces with greater tree coverage.

Members of the public in Sheffield and Manchester were shown images of how their local areas could be developed in the future and were asked to state how much more they would be willing to pay for each scenario.

On Whitworth Street in Manchester, members of the public pay an average of £2.20 per month for street cleaning and £1.50 per month to maintain green spaces through council tax. The survey found that people were willing to pay an extra £1.46 per month to maintain the street in its current state, an extra £1.61 per month if small ornamental trees were planted and up to £2.33 extra per month for large forest trees and grass landscaping.

Meanwhile, in Sheffield city centre near Blonk Street, rents or mortgage payments for small apartments are around £575 per month. The study found that people were willing to pay £4.27 more per month to maintain the new footbridge, riverside walkway and flood defence works that

have recently been completed. If additional landscaping was undertaken in the area they would pay £8.00 more per month. However, they said that they would pay even more – an extra £10.81 per month – if the natural vegetation of the riverside was allowed to re-establish itself.

Similar results were found when people were asked to value alternative redevelopment scenarios for the Nursery Street area next to the River Don in Sheffield city centre. The more green the scenario, the more people said that they would be willing to pay for it. £3.87 was the average extra monthly payment that the public offered for an option that allowed new buildings quite close to the river. This rose to £6.88 extra for a scheme that set buildings back from the river and to £12.17 per month extra to maintain the current appearance of the area. The scenario that included a large area of green space attracted an extra £29.21 per month from the respondents, or £358.92 per year

The research was funded by the Interreg IVB North West Europe programme which aims to to promote strong and prosperous communities. The University worked closely with local policy makers before and during the surveys. In Sheffield they worked with South Yorkshire Forest Partnership, which aims to create a greener, sustainable future for over 200 square miles of South Yorkshire’s diverse rural and urban landscapes. In Manchester the partner was Red Rose Forest, Greater Manchester’s Community Forest, which aims to transform a large part of Manchester into a greener, healthier place to live.

The two surveys were undertaken as part of a project entitled Valuing Attractive Landscapes in the Urban Economy (VALUE), led by South Yorkshire Forest Partnership, which aims to demonstrate the economic value of green infrastructure in cities and regions. The work in Sheffield was done in partnership with the University’s Urban River Corridors and Sustainable Living Agendas (URSULA) project. URSULA provided the advanced visualisations of alternative green scenarios used in the

Sheffield survey. URSULA is funded by the Engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council (EPSRC).

Professor John Henneberry from the University's Department of Town and Regional Planning said: "The results of this research will be used to help to improve the design of green infrastructure investments so that they more closely meet the preferences of the local communities that use them."

Tom Wild, Director of South Yorkshire Forest Partnership, said: "This is great news and a really important piece of evidence. This work proves that attractive, green landscapes really do help create the right setting for investment, to help deliver more sustainable jobs and growth. It couldn't come at a better time, when we are all having to think more carefully about future priorities for what little funding is available.

"The outcome of this research also confirms that we've been pursuing the right approach to innovation, working with the University and with SYFP's network of partners in similar cities across Europe. Not only have we brought a lot of new investment into South Yorkshire, but we've shown how this work can have real impacts on planning and regeneration policy too. By innovating together, we all work smarter, and that's worth a lot nowadays."

Provided by University of Sheffield

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