



Accessing Greenspaces in Scotland

Scottish Youth Parliament – Consultation Workshop

16 March 2019

Note by the Clerk

Introduction

1. At its work programme discussion on 12 December 2018, the Local Government and Communities Committee agreed to propose the topic of accessing green spaces in Scotland to the Scottish Youth Parliament (SYP) for consideration at its sitting on 16 March 2019.
2. This proposal was agreed to by the SYP and the purpose of this note is to provide a summary of the issues discussed during its consultation workshop on 16 March.
3. The note also highlights some of the key themes that came out of a SYP survey that ran from mid-February to 20 March 2019, asking young people to share their views on a range of Scotland-wide issues including questions on the type of greenspaces young people use and the perceived barriers to accessing green spaces.

Background

4. The Committee first considered the issue of accessing greenspaces in Scotland during a round table evidence session on 23 May 2018, hearing evidence from Greenspace Scotland, NHS Health Scotland, Fields in Trust Scotland, Scottish Environment LINK (and Scottish Wildlife Trust), Fife Council, and Edinburgh Green Spaces Forum.
5. During the evidence session, a number of issues were discussed including—
 - Concerns that the quality of green spaces have declined;
 - The role green spaces can play in helping to tackle health and wellbeing outcomes as well as environmental issues;

- Evidence to suggest that people from more deprived areas have the least amount of access to green space and the role green spaces can play in tackling health inequalities;
 - How public funding for green spaces has reduced and the significant role community groups play, particularly in deprived areas, in maintaining green spaces.
 - How green spaces are considered by local authorities – e.g. as assets providing services to address health and environmental concerns as opposed to liabilities based on the cost of maintenance.
 - The definition of “green space” and the value of natural spaces such as woodland green belt areas, not designated as a “green space”.
6. A further issue that was raised was the importance of involving young people in consultations in their communities, parks and streets and how they are often considered the “missing voice” on these matters. The Committee therefore identified an opportunity to engage with young people on this issue through the Scottish Youth Parliament.

Consultation Workshop

7. The Scottish Youth Parliament’s 68th sitting took place on 16 March 2019 at Newbattle Community High School in Dalkeith. The Local Government and Communities Committee was represented by Andy Wightman MSP at the sitting. The consultation workshop was co-led by Andy Wightman and Ryan McShane MSYP, Convener of the Sport and Leisure Committee. A Scottish Parliament clerk and Outreach Officer were also in attendance to support the workshop session.

Workshop discussion

8. As an introduction, participants were invited to select the Scottish Government strategic objective¹ they believed most strongly aligned with the use of greenspaces. The majority of participants believed that greenspaces, and being closer to nature, contribute positively to people’s physical and mental health. One participant argued that greenspaces inspire people to be greener by adopting positive behaviours such as composting and food waste recycling.
9. One participant argued that accessing greenspaces makes people feel safer and stronger, highlighting that many community centres have closed but that, greenspaces provide a way to bring communities together. Another participant believed that using greenspaces help people become smarter, as there are opportunities to develop life skills such as team work and discipline. It was also argued that green spaces can “expand your horizons”.

¹ Wealthier and Fairer, Safer and Stronger, Healthier, Greener and Smarter

10. Participants were then invited to break into small groups (4-5 people) to discuss their experiences of accessing greenspaces in Scotland. To set the scene, Ryan McShane presented a draft motion he intended to put before the Scottish Youth Parliament the following day—

“The Scottish Youth Parliament believes and calls on the Scottish Government and local authorities to ensure participation in sport must be maintained, and that barriers facing young people in our most socially deprived areas have to be minimised”.

Positive experiences

11. Participants discussed their positive experiences of using green spaces. Key themes discussed included—

- **The role of local communities** – MSYPs highlighted that green spaces such as community allotments and community groups, for example, Cupar in Bloom and Barbluie Woodland, can engender a sense of “community spirit” and make people proud of their community. The role of community councils was also discussed as an effective vehicle for developing and maintaining green spaces. There was recognition however that many people may not have the time or be physically able to help maintain green spaces. It was also recognised that some people do not believe it is their social responsibility to preserve green spaces.
- **Access to and availability of green spaces** – MSYPs highlighted that people have the “right to roam” and to explore the wide range of green spaces in Scotland which are free to use and open to all ages. This includes the Cairngorms and local shoreline walks. It was recognised however that green spaces are not always accessible to everyone.
- **Health and wellbeing benefits** – it was widely recognised that using green spaces can improve both physical and mental health, with one group even discussing the possibility of a “National Greenspace Service”. MSYPs also highlighted that green spaces can inspire and stimulate people’s imagination, citing areas around Loch Fyne which includes a Gruffalo Walk.



Negative experiences

12. MSPs were also invited to discuss their negative experiences of using green spaces. Key themes discussed included—











- **The stigma of young people using green spaces** – MSYPs stated that there was a negative societal impression of young people using green spaces, highlighting their experiences of “being constantly moved out”. MSYPs also discussed unfair restrictions that were placed on some green spaces e.g “No ball games” in some parks.
- **The maintenance of green spaces** – there was recognition amongst MSYPs that green spaces need to be maintained to address littering, vandalism, dog fouling, weather damage and path erosion. There was some discussion about green spaces being developed but not maintained (e.g. by local authorities or a housing developer).
- **Green spaces are not adequately funded** – MSYPs recognised that green spaces cost money to maintain. Some MSPs were of the view that local authorities have taken the decision to close parks and that councils are not taking adequate responsibility for the maintenance of green spaces. There was some discussion about the role that charity and lottery funding plays in maintaining green spaces and the importance of holding back some of this funding for inevitable maintenance as referred to above.
- **Lack of consultation with young people** – There was widespread agreement that young people are not consulted in how greenspaces are used. It was suggested that there could be a role for youth groups, schools and MSYPs to provide a platform for engaging with young people on this issue.
- **Feelings of safety** – some MSYPs highlighted the importance of feeling safe. There was a recognition that green spaces are often linked to anti-social behaviours, which can create a barrier to using them. It was also suggested that a lack of streetlights may make certain green spaces feel unsafe (but that it would be impractical to have streetlights in many places).



SYP survey

13. The SYP survey that ran from mid-February until 20 March 2019 asked young people (aged 12-25) what the main barriers were to accessing green spaces in Scotland. The results were as follows—

Main barriers to accessing green spaces

1	Public transport		46.69%
2	Lack of parks		34.14%
3	Lack of adequate sports facilities		23.93%
4	Lack of free time		52.53%
5	Weather		60.41%
6	Lack of safety		25.19%
7	Living in a deprived area		25.49%
8	Closures of green spaces		18.48%
9	Lack of maintenance of green spaces		36.67%
10	Other (please specify):*		4.09%

14. The survey results reflect much of the discussion that took place during the consultation workshop. Other perceived barriers that feature prominently in the survey, but were not expressly raised by MSYPs during the consultation workshop included the lack of free time, public transport, lack of parks and living in a deprived area.

Conclusions and recommendations

15. Following discussion in the consultation workshop, participants were asked to sum up how young people want green spaces to be understood, used, invested in and maintained. Participants reached these conclusions—

1. The importance of communities in maintaining green spaces.
2. The wide range of green space options available to people living in Scotland.
3. The funding available for green spaces is not sustainable.
4. Young people using green spaces are considered “burdens”.
5. Young people should be widely consulted with on how greenspaces are used and there could be a role for MSYPs in achieving this.



Next steps

16. The discussion and recommendations put forward by the SYP will be brought to the attention of the Local Government and Communities Committee which may lead to further work on this topic at a future date.