

# A Needs Assessment relating to the Provision of Natural Greenspace in areas with Low Levels of Physical Activity



## Technical Summary

20 May 2016

Report to:

Kent Nature Partnership  
Health & Nature Subgroup

**A Needs Assessment relating to the Provision of Natural Greenspace in areas  
with Low Levels of Physical Activity**

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### Aims

This study set out to establish the proximity, accessibility and naturalness of greenspace in areas of Kent where the population is characterised by low levels of physical activity. Subsequently, this assessment was used to prioritise areas for future action and investment, based on levels of population deprivation, size and need.

Throughout the report 'accessibility to greenspace' (including 'access of greenspace') refers to a site being accessible via some form of public right of way. However, this does not necessarily mean that the site is accessible to all sectors of society (e.g. individuals with a physical disability); accounting for the quality of the access route was beyond the scope of this project.

Greenspace is defined as *'places where human control and activities are not intensive so that a feeling of naturalness is allowed to predominate'* (as described by Natural England<sup>1</sup>). Greenspace includes *'all open space of public value, including not just land, but also areas of water such as rivers, canals, lakes and reservoirs which offer important opportunities for sport and recreation and can also act as a visual amenity'*<sup>2</sup>. Physical activity is defined as *'body movement that expends energy and raises the heart rate'*<sup>3</sup>

### Methods

The study used four types of spatial data for Kent covering boundaries, access routes, greenspace and population. Interpretation of a 'feeling of naturalness' is guided by a four stage rating as a proxy for measuring naturalness<sup>4</sup>. This guidance was used to assign a level of naturalness to each area of greenspace.

Two sets of accessibility standards were used to identify greenspace provision for the population at each postcode: Access to Natural Greenspace Standard<sup>5</sup> (ANGSt) and

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<sup>1</sup> Natural England (2010) *'Nature Nearby' Accessible Natural Greenspace Guidance*. <http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20160323000001/http://publications.naturalengland.org.uk/publication/40004>. Accessed 24/3/16.

<sup>2</sup> ODPM (2002) *Planning Policy Guidance 17: Planning for open space, sport and recreation*. HMSO

<sup>3</sup> Public Health England (2014) *Everybody active, every day: An evidence-based approach to physical activity*.

<sup>4</sup> Natural England (2010) *'Nature Nearby' Accessible Natural Greenspace Guidance*.

<sup>5</sup> Natural England (2010) *'Nature Nearby' Accessible Natural Greenspace Guidance*.

Dover District Council accessibility standard<sup>6</sup> (Box 1). The analyses were repeated for two combinations of site naturalness: (i) naturalness level 1, 2 & 3 and, (ii) naturalness level 1 (more 'natural' greenspaces). The analyses used distance along access routes (footpaths and pavements) from postcodes to greenspace entrance points.

Data were analysed at the geographic resolution of Lower Super Output Areas (LSOA) and subsequently categorised by Rural-Urban classification<sup>7</sup>, the Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD)<sup>8</sup>, physical inactivity, district and Clinical Commissioning Group.

In order to identify priority areas for action, LSOAs were divided into five groups based on the level of inactivity with the highest priority given to the most physically inactive populations.

#### **Box 1: Accessibility standards used in this study**

ANGSt:

- At least 1 site >2 ha within 300 m of where people live
- At least 1 site >20 ha within 2 km of where people live
- At least 1 site >100 ha within 5 km of where people live
- At least 1 site >500 ha within 10 km of where people live

DDC accessibility standard:

- At least 1 site >0.4 ha within 300 m of where people live in urban locations or at least 1 site >2 ha within 1 km of where people live in rural locations

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<sup>6</sup> DDC Parks and Amenity Open Space Strategy 2013 & Land Allocations Local Plan 2015.

<sup>7</sup> <http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/guide-method/geography/products/area-classifications/2011-rural-urban/index.html>.

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/english-indices-of-deprivation-2015>.

## Results

Results show:

- Only 13% of the Kent population meet all four ANGSt for greenspace accessibility.
- Nine percent of the population do not meet any ANGSt for naturalness level 1, 2 & 3 sites.
- Two-thirds (66%) of the population do not meet ANGSt for naturalness level 1, 2 & 3 greenspace within 300 m of home, and 28% do not meet the ANGSt for naturalness level 1, 2 & 3 greenspace of at least 20 ha within 2 km of home.
- Less than half (44%) of the population do not meet the DDC accessibility standard (for naturalness level 1, 2 & 3 greenspace of at least 0.4 ha within 300 m of home in urban areas or 2 ha within 1 km in rural areas).
- The least well met standard across Kent was ANGSt of at least one 2 ha site within 300 m, for both naturalness levels 1, 2 & 3 and naturalness level 1 greenspace (i.e. sites categorised as having a greater 'feeling of naturalness' and which are, potentially, more biodiverse).
- Physical inactivity was associated with higher levels of deprivation.
- A weak correlation was found between deprivation and some accessibility standards, indicating that populations in deprived areas have greater access to greenspace although this is highly variable.
- No significant relationship was found between physical inactivity and the accessibility of naturalness level 1, 2, and 3 greenspace (for any ANGSt or DCC standards).
- A significant relationship was found between physical inactivity and the accessibility of naturalness level 1 greenspace of a least 2 ha within 300 m, meaning that populations with less access to such sites were more likely to be physically inactive.
- In Kent, the larger areas of accessible greenspace (especially greenspace of 500 ha or more) tend to be naturalness level 1.

The highest priority areas for action are the 18 LSOAs identified as having more than 80% of the population physically inactive; amongst these, less than half of the population within 13 LSOAs meet ANGSt for a greenspace of at least 2 ha within 300 m.

## Conclusions and recommendations

Physical activity is known to be beneficial for a range of key health and wellbeing outcomes. There is growing evidence that the provision of, and access to, natural greenspace can support physical activity, health and wellbeing. Where accessibility to greenspace is lacking, improving access and/or creation of additional greenspace is recommended. Our analysis suggests that in the Kent population physical inactivity is not consistently linked to accessible greenspace provision. It is therefore also recommended that initiatives to promote use of greenspace for physical activity would bring health benefits to people who are not active enough. Exploring the barriers to using existing greenspace is also necessary as there may be reasons (e.g. safety, quality of greenspace) why people do not currently use local sites for physical activity.

The next steps will be for the Health and Nature Sub-group of the Kent Nature Partnership to prepare an action plan based on the findings from this study.