Monitor of Engagement with the Natural Environment

The national survey on people and the natural environment

Visits to urban greenspaces (2009-2016)

Foreword

Natural England produces a range of reports providing evidence and advice to assist us in delivering our duties.

Background

In 2009 Natural England, Defra and the Forestry Commission commissioned Kantar TNS to undertake the Monitor of Engagement with the Natural Environment (MENE) survey for the first time.

The data enables Natural England, its partners and data users to:

- Understand how people use, enjoy and are motivated to protect the natural environment.
- Monitor changes in use of the natural environment over time, at a range of different spatial scales and for key groups within the population.
- Inform on-the-ground initiatives to help them link more closely to people's needs.
- Evaluate the impact and effectiveness of related policy and initiatives.
- Measure the impact of and inform policy relating to the natural environment.

This report

This report presents the results of an analysis of the MENE findings from the first seven years of fieldwork from March 2009 to February 2016 regarding visits to the urban greenspaces (destinations described by respondents as being in a town or city).

A separate headline report providing a broader overview of the latest survey findings is available separately.

Published alongside these reports is a technical report providing full details of the survey methodology, sampling, grossing and weighting and estimates of confidence intervals.

Please see GOV.UK for further outputs from the survey:
https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/monitor-of-engagement-with-the-natural-environment-survey-purpose-and-results

National Statistics

The UK Statistics Authority has designated these statistics as National Statistics, in accordance with the Statistics and Registration Service Act 2007 and signifying compliance with the Code of Practice for Official Statistics.

Designation can be broadly interpreted to mean that the statistics:

- Meet identified user needs.
- Are well explained and readily accessible.
- Are produced according to sound methods.
- Are managed impartially and objectively in the public interest.

Once statistics have been designated as National Statistics it is a statutory requirement that the Code of Practice shall continue to be observed.

The responsible Statistician for this publication is Ken Roy: Ken.Roy@naturalengland.org.uk

Keywords: visits, engagement, natural environment, urban, greenspaces, participation, motivations, barriers and activities

This report can be downloaded from the Natural England website:
https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/monitor-of-engagement-with-the-natural-environment-2015-to-2016

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1 Executive summary

As the majority of England's population are living in urban[1] areas, there is a lot to be learned about current uses of and attitudes towards urban greenspaces. The urban visit destinations analysed in this report have been identified from a survey question asking respondents to define the type of place they visited, using 'town or city' as the basis for analysis. This question is asked after recording the number of visits taken out of doors in the last seven days (excluding time spent in gardens). Questions can be asked about what this means for the future of urban outdoor recreation and interventions aimed at increasing the physical and/or mental health of England's urban population.

This report utilises the MENE data to investigate this topic in-depth - looking at attitudinal and behavioural data, as well as the insight offered by an investigation of visits taken to urban greenspaces within England. For the purposes of this report, urban greenspaces have been identified from a survey question asking respondents to define the type of place they visited, using 'town or city' as the basis for analysis. Urban greenspace residents were identified using geographic profiling of respondent origin data.

There is an inherent challenge in analysing both visits to urban greenspaces and those taken by residents of urban areas. As a large proportion of England's population live in urban areas, there is a high degree of overlap between the analysis of visits taken to urban greenspaces and the behaviour/ characteristics of those living in urban areas. This report analyses both visits taken to urban greenspace and the behaviour of the urban population in England for a rounded view of urban greenspace use and urban population behaviour.

Introduction

MENE provides information about the relationship between people and the natural environment. Whilst the main focus of the survey is on visits to the natural environment, it also captures other ways of using or enjoying the natural environment such as time spent in the garden and watching nature programmes on television.

The objectives of the survey are to:

- Provide estimates of the number of visits to the natural environment by the adult population in England (16 years and over)
- Measure the extent of participation in visits to the natural environment and identify the barriers and drivers that shape participation
- Provide robust information on the characteristics of visitors and visits to the natural environment
- Measure other ways of using and enjoying the natural environment
- Identify patterns in use and participation for key groups within the population and at a range of spatial scales

This report forms one part of a larger suite of outputs from the survey. Published alongside this report are an annual headline report, a technical report and SPSS and Excel data sets. To access these, go to:

https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/monitor-of-engagement-with-the-natural-environment-survey-purpose-and-results

Summary – what we know and why urban greenspaces are important

- England's population is principally urban, with 81 per cent of the population reported as living in urban areas in 2015/16, equating to an estimated 35.1 million people (MENE data).
- Access to urban greenspaces is important from a social equity perspective - they are used by groups that generally exhibit a lower propensity to visit the natural environment and those less likely to take visits further afield. These groups include those aged 16-34, those of Black and

[1] The definition of urban used may differ from the official statistical definition www.gov.uk/government/collections/rural-urban-classification - see later in report for clarification on definitions used

Minority ethnic (BAME) origin, those in manual or unskilled work (social groups D and E's) and those not in paid employment.

- Urban greenspaces are increasingly utilised resources, a finding which has implications for a range of areas including urban planning and health. An estimated 1.16 billion visits were taken to this type of destination in 2009/10 compared to an estimated 1.46 billion in 2015/16. Such a change may be due to population increases, more people taking visits or a combination of these factors.
- Urban greenspace visits are, for some, a potential source of physical activity not accessed elsewhere. MENE data has shown that two-fifths of urban residents do not exercise at a sufficient level to obtain any health benefit at all. It may be that, for some urban residents, visits to the natural environment are the only opportunity for the provision of some physical health benefit.
- Much has been written on the benefits of accessing greenspaces in all types of locations, including urban greenspaces. A study undertaken by a team at Exeter University suggested that increasing urban greenspaces may be instrumental in delivering ongoing public health benefits[2], while a separate project found that people who lived in urban areas with greater amounts of greenspace were generally happier, exhibiting lower mental distress and higher life satisfaction[3].

Exploring greenspaces through MENE

- Since 2009/10, the adult population of England[4] (aged 16+) has increased to an estimated 43.4 million in 2015/16 (based on MENE weighting data). England's population is principally urban, with 81 per cent of the population reported as living in urban areas in 2015, equating to an estimated 34.5 million people.
- Population changes recorded to date and those projected for the future have implications across a wide variety of areas, not least how urban populations engage with and use the natural environment.
- As highlighted at the start of this report, it should be noted there are instances where data relating to urban greenspace visits is reflective, at least in part, of the behaviour of those living in urban areas given the bias towards this type of area amongst the population of England as a whole.

The urban population and the natural environment

- The vast majority of the urban population claimed to have taken visits to the natural environment for recreation in the last 12 months (93 per cent), a slightly higher proportion than amongst the rural population (91 per cent).
- There has been an increase in frequent visits over time from 52 per cent of urban residents claiming to visit the outdoors once a week or more over the last 12 months in 2009/10 to 56 per cent in 2015/16. This equates to an increase from an estimated 17.4 million to an estimated 20.5 million urban residents visiting the natural environment on at least a weekly basis, a change that roughly mirrors the overall population increase.
- Infrequent visitors in urban areas were more likely than rural residents to cite lifestyle barriers as a reason for not visiting, namely being busy at home or at work. Health issues and age were more prevalent amongst the barriers cited by infrequent visitors living in rural areas.
- Across all seven years of MENE, four in ten urban residents (40 per cent) had taken at least one visit to the natural environment in the 7 days prior to being interviewed, with little variation for the individual survey years over this period.
- There are some social groups that make up a higher proportion of the total population in urban areas as compared to rural areas. MENE tells us that these groups - 16-34 year olds, those of BAME origin, DEs, those not in paid employment and those who do not own a dog – are less likely to visit the natural environment.

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[2] 'Longitudinal effects on mental health of moving to greener and less green urban areas (2014), Ian Alcock, Mathew P. White, Benedict W. Wheeler, Lora E. Fleming, and Michael H. Depledge
https://ore.exeter.ac.uk/repository/bitstream/handle/10871/15080/es403688w_white.pdf?sequence=2&isAllowed=y

[3] 'Would you be happier living in a greener urban area?' Mathew P. White, Ian Alcock, Benedict W. Wheeler and Michael H. Depledge, Psychological Science, published online 23 April 2013
www.ecehh.org/research-projects/urban-green-space

[4] Based on weighting information produced for MENE from BARB 2011 and 2012 Based Population Projections for 2015 England

- Overall, residents of urban areas are less likely than rural residents to state that they undertake any of the pro-environmental behaviours featured in MENE, such as recycling or choosing to walk/cycle rather than taking the car (88 per cent and 93 per cent respectively).

Increasingly used and locally accessed urban greenspaces

- Visits to urban greenspaces have shown less volatility across the seasons than those taken to other destination types, showing these to be well and continuously utilised spaces for outdoor recreation.
- A defining characteristic of visits to urban greenspaces is that they are more likely to be taken by people who live locally than visits to other destinations, a pattern which has been consistent throughout the course of the MENE survey to date:
    - Half of visits taken to greenspaces within towns and cities involved a journey of less than 1 mile to reach the visit destination.
    - The average distance travelled has decreased for these visits from an average of 5.2 miles in 2009/10 to 4.2 in 2014/15 and 2015/16.
    - Around seven in ten visits to urban greenspaces were taken on foot in 2015/16.
    - There has been a decrease in the use of cars/vans to reach the visit destination on urban visits between 2009/10 and 2015/16.
- Urban greenspace visits were more likely to be taken for the purpose of entertaining children than visits taken to other areas, highlighting the benefits of these places for a range of age groups and as a potential opportunity to connect children with nature.

Uses of urban greenspaces – who and why?

- Compared to other destination types, urban greenspace visits are more likely to be taken by:
    - Those between the ages of 16 and 34.
    - Those in the Black and Minority Ethnic Population (BAME) – although this proportion is still lower than for the urban population as a whole.
    - Those in the lower DE social grades.
    - Those not in paid employment.
    - Those who do not have access to a car or van.
    - People with children in their household.
- Between 2009/10 and 215/16, however, the proportion of DEs visiting urban greenspaces has decreased. This variation has coincided with an overall increase amongst the English adult population of those in the AB social grades and a decrease in the proportion of DEs. Given that ABs tend to take more frequent visits, it is likely that these overall population changes have impacted on the social grade profile of urban visits, although it is unclear of the extent that population changes alone underpin changes in trends.
- Urban greenspace visits typically involve a more limited range of places[5] being visited than other general location categories such as coastal areas and the countryside. Parks in towns and cities were by far the most commonly visited destination, with 47 per cent of urban greenspace visits taken to this type of place. 14 per cent were taken to another open space in a town/ city, 11 per cent to a path/ cycleway or bridleway and seven per cent to a river/ lake or canal in an urban area.
- As for all outdoor visits, walking was the most popular activity undertaken on urban visits. In comparison to countryside and other coastal visits, those taken to urban greenspaces were more likely to involve playing with children (12 per cent of urban visits).

The benefits of urban greenspaces

- Much has been written on the benefits of accessing greenspaces in all types of locations, including urban greenspaces. Research studies have concluded that:

[5] Sub-categories of urban greenspaces rather than specific geographical locations

    - Moving to an area with more urban greenspace had a significant and sustained impact on the mental health of residents living in such areas[6].
    - People living in urban areas with greater amounts of greenspace were generally happier, exhibiting lower mental distress and higher life satisfaction[7].
- In MENE, amongst all urban visitors, exercising a dog (41 per cent), health/exercise (38 per cent) and/or fresh air/pleasant weather (21 per cent) were the key motivations recorded.
- While the range of motivations for urban greenspace visits tends to be more limited than for other destination types, this has increased over the years, with several motivations recording significant increases between 2009/10 and 2015/16, the largest of which were for health or exercise (up by nine percentage points to 41 per cent), fresh air/ pleasant weather (up by eight percentage points to 23 per cent) and to 'be somewhere you like' (up by seven percentage points to 13 per cent).

Greenspace quality and availability

- 14 per cent of urban residents indicated that they have no access to any private outdoor space, compared to just three per cent of rural residents. This arguably strengthens the importance of communal greenspaces in urban areas.
- There were variations in strong agreement with several statements regarding the accessibility and quality of local greenspaces between urban and rural populations. The largest variations related to residents of urban areas being less likely than those living in rural areas to strongly agree that their local greenspaces were within easy walking distance and/or of a high enough quality to want to spend time there.

[6] 'Longitudinal effects on mental health of moving to greener and less green urban areas (2014), Ian Alcock, Mathew P. White, Benedict W. Wheeler, Lora E. Fleming, and Michael H. Depledge
https://ore.exeter.ac.uk/repository/bitstream/handle/10871/15080/es403688w_white.pdf?sequence=2&isAllowed=y

[7] 'Would you be happier living in a greener urban area?' Mathew P. White, Ian Alcock, Benedict W. Wheeler and Michael H. Depledge, Psychological Science, published online 23 April 2013
www.ecehh.org/research-projects/urban-green-space

2 Introduction

This report focuses on visits taken to urban[8] greenspaces. Data has been analysed using results from the Monitor of Engagement with the Natural Environment (MENE) survey using data collected between March 2009 and February 2016. For the purposes of this report, urban greenspace visits have been identified from a survey question asking respondents to define the type of place they visited, using 'town or city' as the basis for analysis. This question is asked after recording the number of visits taken out of doors in the last seven days (excluding time spent in gardens).

Urban greenspace residents were identified using geographic profiling of respondent origin data.

Background

The MENE survey was conducted by Kantar TNS on behalf of Natural England, the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) and the Forestry Commission.

In the seven years since the survey commenced, a wealth of evidence on outdoor recreation behaviour, attitudes and engagement with the natural environment has been collected. MENE has provided a basis for specific analysis on areas such as how members of different societal groups and children engage with the outdoors. The data set also provides scope for deeper exploration of the data in relation to areas such as well-being, the relationship between valuing the natural environment and actions taken to protect it and visits taken to specific types of place.

The size of the MENE dataset has allowed detailed investigation into various themes of interest, as well as spatial reports focusing on specific areas within England. Several previous MENE publications are of particular relevance to this report including:

- A report commissioned specifically to inform the development of a community-based outdoors learning and health demonstration project in East London[9]. This utilised MENE data to understand how enabling better access to greenspace can address social inequalities by delivering health and learning outcomes
- A report on visit taking which analysed data collected between 2009 and 2012 through MENE in order to better understand the profile of visits taken in the South Pennines[10] and the demographics, levels of visit taking, motivations and barriers amongst people living in surrounding local authorities

MENE fieldwork uses the Kantar TNS in-home omnibus survey with at least 800 interviews undertaken with a sample representative of adult residents (aged 16+) in England every week. This provides an average annual sample size of around 47,000 interviews.

MENE aims and objectives

MENE provides information about the relationship between people and the natural environment. Whilst the main focus of the survey is on visits to the natural environment, it also captures other ways of using or enjoying the natural environment such as time spent in the garden and watching nature programmes on television.

The objectives of the survey are to:

- Provide estimates of the number of visits to the natural environment by the adult population in England (16 years and over)
- Measure the extent of participation in visits to the natural environment and identify the barriers and drivers that shape participation
- Provide robust information on the characteristics of visitors and visits to the natural environment.

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[8] The definition of urban used may differ from the official statistical definition www.gov.uk/government/collections/rural-urban-classification - clarification on definitions used is provided in this report where appropriate

[9] http://publications.naturalengland.org.uk/publication/5400445944070144

[10] http://publications.naturalengland.org.uk/publication/4535521443315712

- Measure other ways of using and enjoying the natural environment
- Identify patterns in use and participation for key groups within the population and at a range of spatial scales

MENE survey scope

The survey relates to engagement with the natural environment. By natural environment we mean all open spaces in and around towns and cities as well as the wider countryside and coastline.

The main focus of the survey is on leisure visits to the outdoors in the natural environment, away from home and private gardens. This could be anything from a few minutes to all day. These may include time spent close to a person's home or workplace, further afield or while on holiday in England. Routine shopping trips or time spent in a person's own garden are not included in the definition of a leisure visit.

The survey also includes a smaller section of questions regarding engagement with the natural environment other than that experienced during visits. This includes activities such as time spent in private gardens, watching nature programmes on television, undertaking pro-environmental activities such as recycling, and access to a private garden.

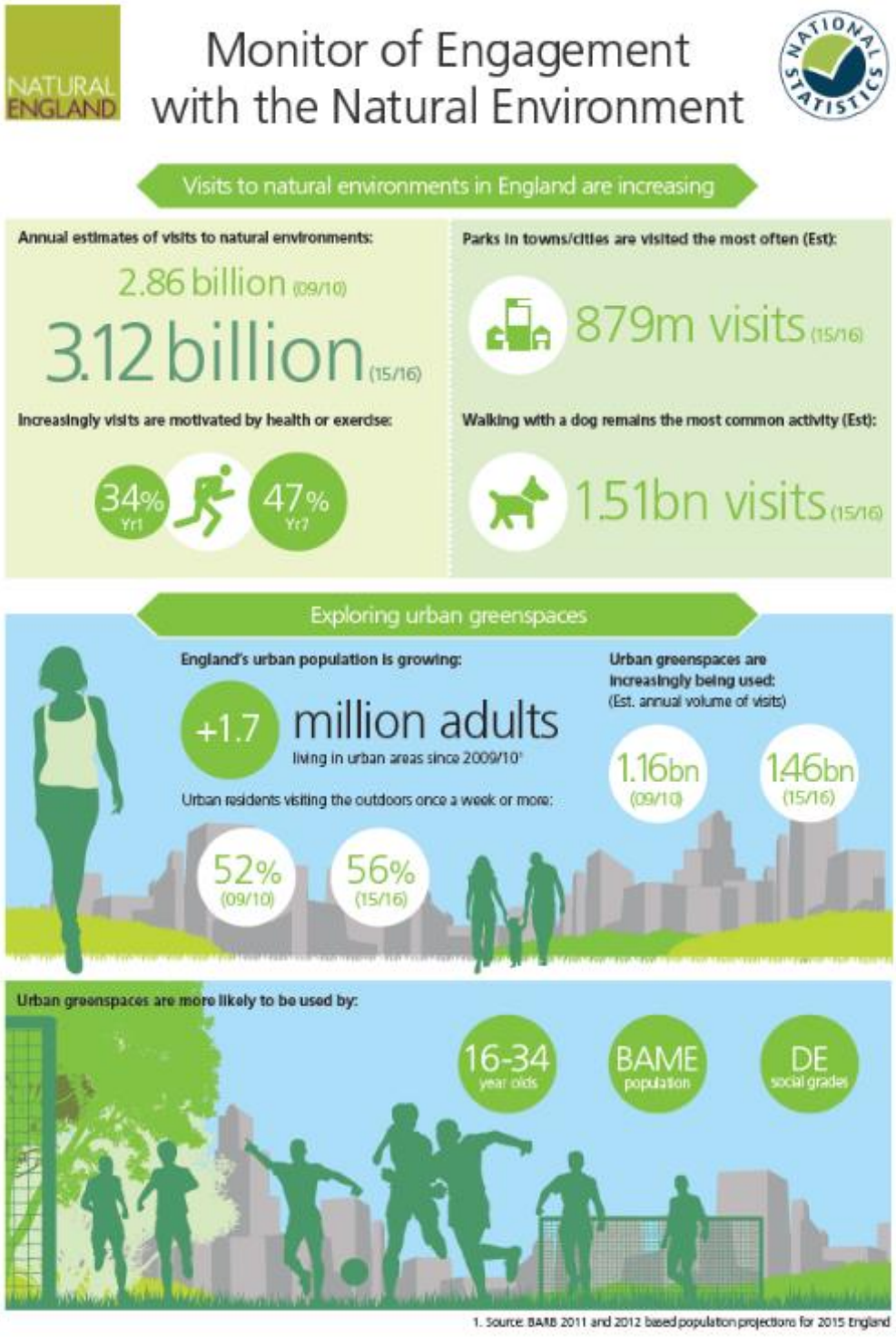
Please note that any trends or variations between results highlighted in the text are statistically significant unless stated otherwise. This means that differences between results, for example when comparing two years or two population groups, have been proven through statistical analysis as likely to be real differences at the 95 per cent confidence limits, as opposed to differences which are the result of sampling error or chance.

Further publications from the survey

This report forms one part of a larger suite of outputs from the survey. Published alongside this report are an annual headline report, a technical report, an electronic data viewer, and SPSS and Excel data sets. To access these, go to:

https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/monitor-of-engagement-with-the-natural-environment-survey-purpose-and-results

3 Headline findings

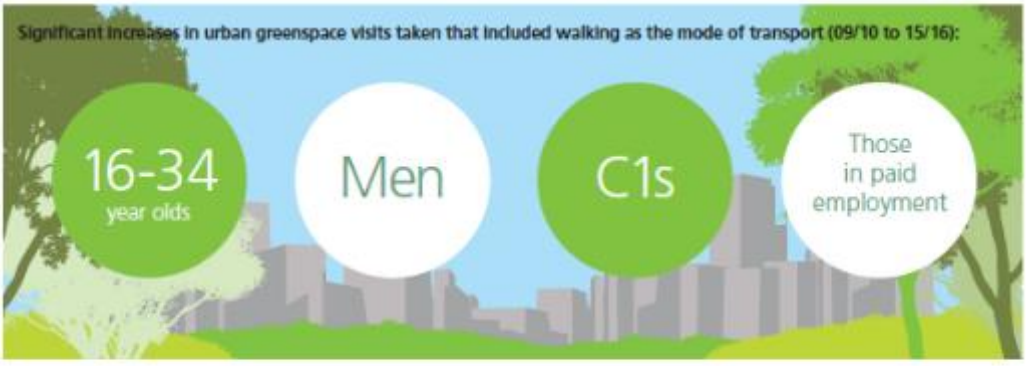


Urban greenspaces are characterised by local visits

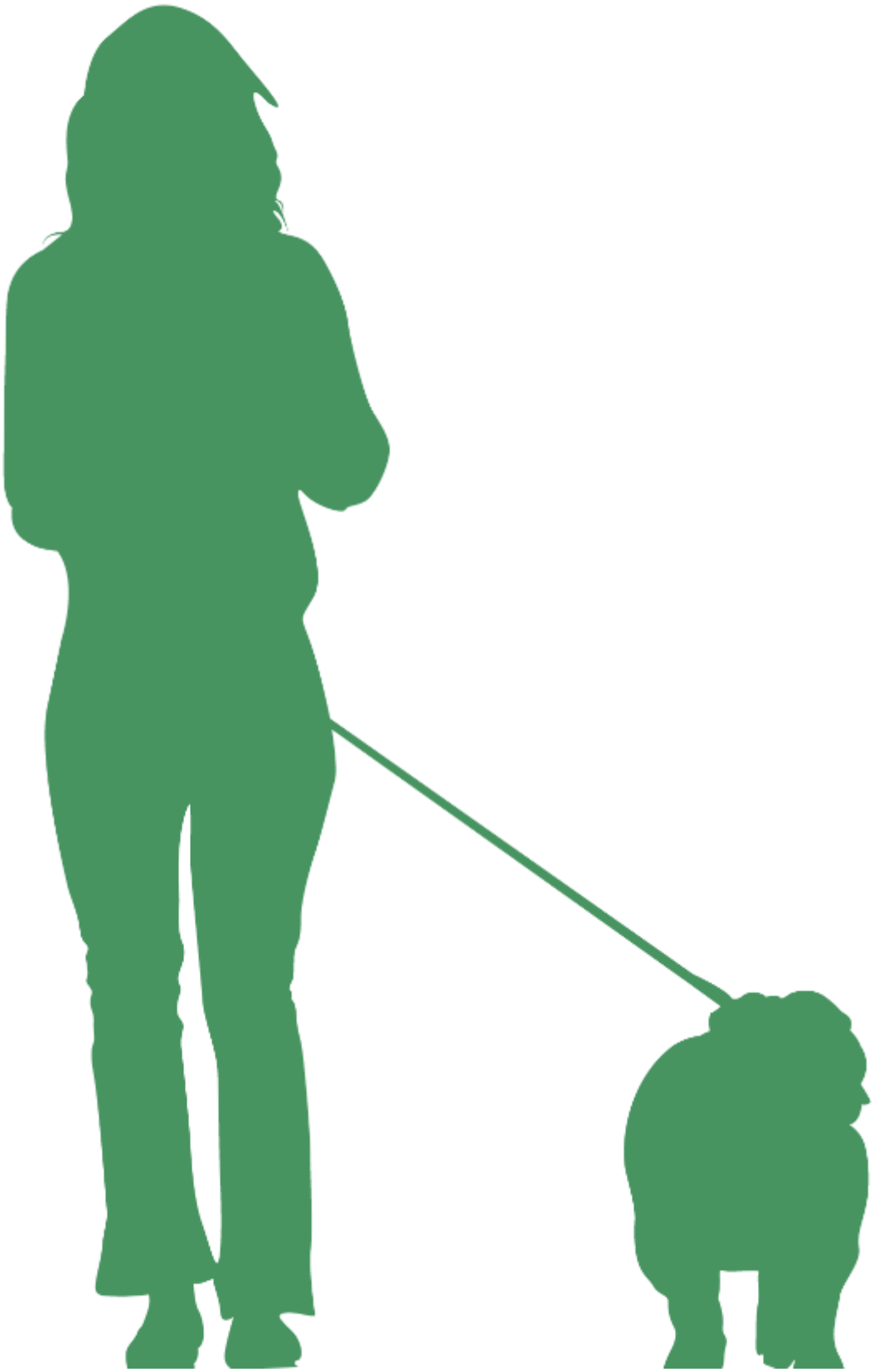
75% are within 2 miles of start point

Visits taken on foot (%):

64% (09/10) 69% (15/16)



KANTAR TNS



4 Exploring urban greenspaces through MENE

England's urban population is growing

Since 2009/10, the adult population of England[11] (aged 16+) has increased from an estimated 41.4 million people to an estimated 43.4 million in 2015/16. England's population is principally urban, with 81 per cent of the population reported as living in urban areas in 2015/16, equating to an estimated 35.1 million people (MENE data).

Increases have been recorded for both the urban and rural populations over this time period of five per cent each. However, the largest increase in terms of numbers has been recorded for urban areas (an increase of around 1.7 million adults aged 16 and over). Given that the adult population of England is projected to increase by around 7 per cent by 2026[12], it is reasonable to assume that increases in the urban population will continue (although factors such as an ageing population mean that visits will not necessarily increase or perhaps not to the same degree).

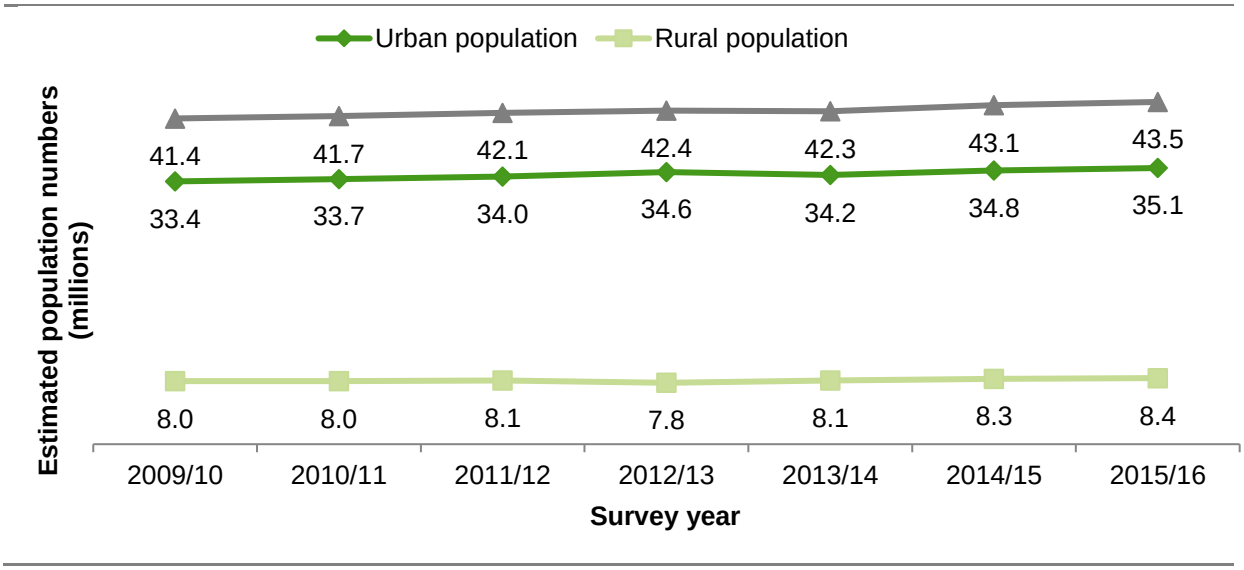


Figure 4-1 Changes in urban and rural populations in England over time (aged 16+) %
Source: Based on weighting information produced for MENE from BARB 2011 and 2012 Based Population Projections for 2015 England

Increasing understanding of urban greenspaces

Population changes recorded to date and those projected for the future have implications across a wide variety of areas, not least how urban populations engage with and use the natural environment.

In light of the proportion of England's population living in urban areas and trends reported in MENE for visits taken close to home, there is a lot to be learned about current uses of and attitudes towards urban greenspaces. Questions can be asked about what this means for the future of urban outdoor recreation and interventions aimed at increasing the physical and/or mental health of England's urban population.

This report utilises the MENE data to investigate this topic. The following chapters explore this in more detail by looking at attitudinal and behavioural data, as well as the insight offered by an investigation of visits taken to urban greenspaces within England as follows:

[11] Based on weighting information produced for MENE from BARB 2011 and 2012 Based Population Projections for 2015 England

[12] Source https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/populationandmigration/populationprojections/datasets/tablea14principalprojectionenglandsummary

Section 5: Setting the scene: the urban population and the natural environment – This section examines the overall propensity of the urban population in England to visit the natural environment, as well as looking at the barriers to visiting, the demographic characteristics of England's urban population and participation in activities to help preserve the natural environment.

Section 6: Increasingly used and locally accessed urban greenspaces – This section examines the increased levels of visits taken to urban greenspaces over time, as well as discussing the characteristics of such visits including their typically local and cross-seasonal nature.

Section 7: Uses of urban greenspaces – who and why? – This section focuses on the groups likely to take urban visits and how this varies from other destinations.

Section 8: The benefits of urban greenspaces – This section examines the positive outcomes associated with visits to urban greenspaces and motivations for visiting these areas.

Section 9: Greenspace quality and availability – Here the report presents data on access to private outdoor spaces and also investigates how local greenspaces are viewed by the urban population.

5 Setting the scene: the urban population and the natural environment

Before examining visits to urban greenspaces in more detail, it is helpful to lay a foundation of analysis based on the urban population[13] regarding propensity to take visits, as well as attitudes towards the natural environment and its conservation.

Urban residents claim to be visiting more frequently than before

The vast majority of the urban population claimed to have taken visits to the natural environment for recreation in the last 12 months (93 per cent).

Urban residents visit less frequently, on average, that those living in rural areas. 54 per cent of the urban population reported visiting the outdoors on a frequent basis in the last 12 months between 2009/10 and 2015/16 (once a week or more) compared to almost two thirds of the rural population (64 per cent).

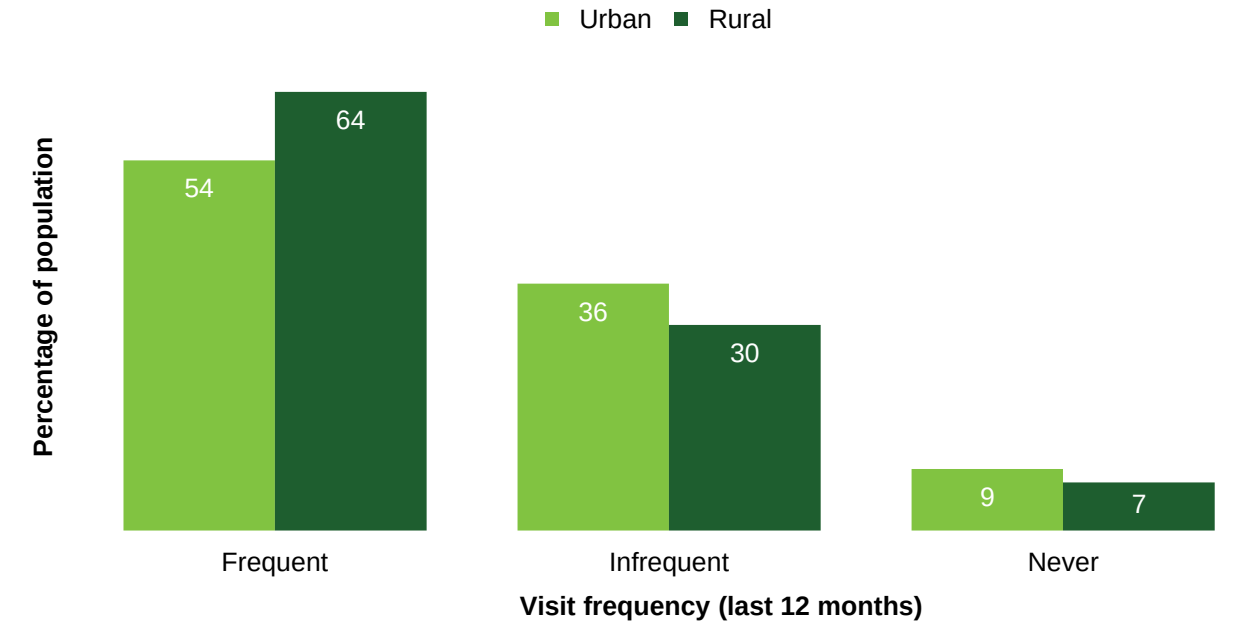


Figure 5-1 Frequency of visits in last 12 months by urban/ rural population %
MENE March 2009 to February 2016, total population, monthly question: Urban (60,632); Rural (11,827)
Please note that, due to rounding, these figures may not equal 100%

Despite the lower frequency of visits taken by the urban population in comparison to rural residents, there has been an increase in frequent visits over time (as shown in Figure 5-2 overleaf). In year one of MENE (2009/10), 52 per cent of urban residents claimed to visit the outdoors once a week or more compared to 56 per cent in year seven (2015/16). This equates to an increase from an estimated 17.4 million to an estimated 20.5 million urban residents visiting the natural environment on at least a weekly basis, an increase that roughly mirrors the overall population increase.

[13]The urban and rural population definitions are based on the Defra classifications - see https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/239477/RUC11methodologypaperaug_28_Aug.pdf The totals will not equal the total sample due to a small proportion of incorrect postcodes or this information being refused, meaning that these respondents could not be classified

Please note that the urban population may include urban areas in coastal locations as well as towns/cities. Urban visits (discussed later) are based on the respondent's self-definition of visits to towns/ cities.

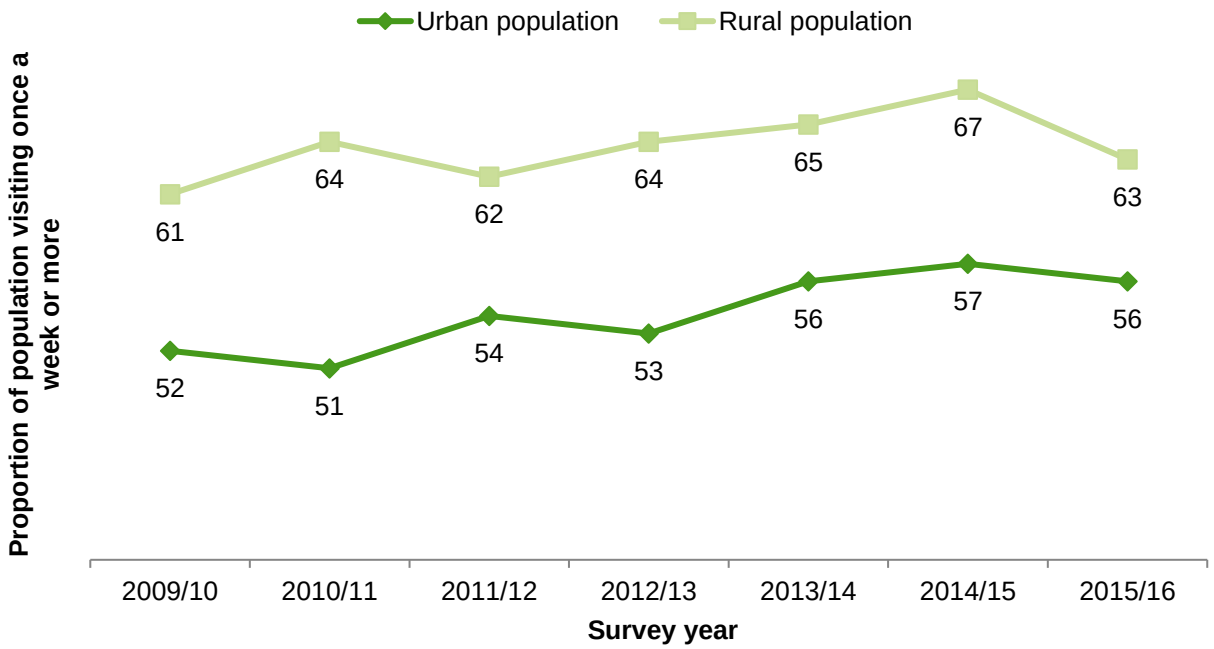


Figure 5-2 Frequency of visits in last 12 months by urban/ rural population and survey year %

MENE March 2009 to February 2016, urban/rural populations, monthly question: 2009/10 (8,952/1,993), 2010/11 (7,945/1663), 2011/12 (8,627/1,812), 2012/13 (8,825/1,478), 2013/14 (8,600/1,767), 2014/15 (8,711/1,551), 2015/16 (8,972/1,563)
Please note that, due to rounding, these figures may not equal 100%

With the exception of 2015/16, a similar pattern appears to be evident for rural residents, however, sample sizes mean that this is not a statistically significant variation.

Projected increases in the urban population mean that there is the potential for an increase in visits to the natural environment in the future, particularly if the proportion of the population taking such visits remains level or continues to increase. However, projected increases in the population are no guarantee of increased visits being taken. Other considerations, such as demographic factors (for example, an ageing population or levels of deprivation), greenspace availability or quality may influence propensity for visits to the natural environment.

Busyness is seen as a barrier for urban residents

Those who visited the outdoors infrequently (every two months or less often) were asked about their reasons for not visiting more often, or indeed at all. There are differences in the types of barriers more likely to be quoted by urban and rural residents, as shown in Table 5-1 (below).

Infrequent visitors in urban areas were more likely than rural residents who visited infrequently to cite lifestyle barriers as a reason for not visiting, namely being busy at home or at work. Health issues and age were more prevalent amongst the barriers cited by infrequent visitors living in rural areas.

Table 5-1 Barriers to visiting more often by urban/ rural population

MENE March 2009 to February 2016, all urban/rural visiting outdoors once every 2-3 months or less often, monthly question: (16,435/2,452)

	Proportion of infrequent/ non-visitors	
	Urban (%)	**Rural (%)**
Old age	11	**18***
Poor health	15	**22***
Physical disability	8	**11***
Too busy at home	17	14
Too busy at work	**27***	22
No particular reason	**15***	11

Note: Figures in bold and with an asterisk are significantly different when compared with the other population group e.g. the proportion of rural residents citing old age is significantly higher than the proportion recorded amongst urban residents

A change in the frequency of urban visits has been observed

As shown in Figure 5-3, reflecting the general visit frequency results discussed previously, urban residents were also less likely to have taken any visits in the last seven days than residents of rural areas. Across all seven years of MENE, four in ten urban residents (40 per cent) had taken at least one visit to the natural environment in the 7 days prior to being interviewed, with little variation for the individual survey years over this period.

This compares to 51 per cent of rural residents, a proportion which has also been relatively stable over the course of MENE.

40 per cent of **urban** residents had taken any visits in last 7 days

51 per cent of **rural** residents had taken any visits in last 7 days

Figure 5-3 Visits in last 7 days by urban/ rural population

MENE March 2009 to February 2016, total urban/rural population, weekly question:(265,419/52,989)

Amongst those who had taken any visits in the last 7 days, the frequency of visit taking was once again lower amongst those living in urban areas – 64 per cent of rural visitors took 2 or more visits compared to 55 per cent of visitors living in urban areas.

By way of contrast, around a fifth of rural residents had taken between 6 and 10 visits (21 per cent) compared to 14 per cent of urban residents.

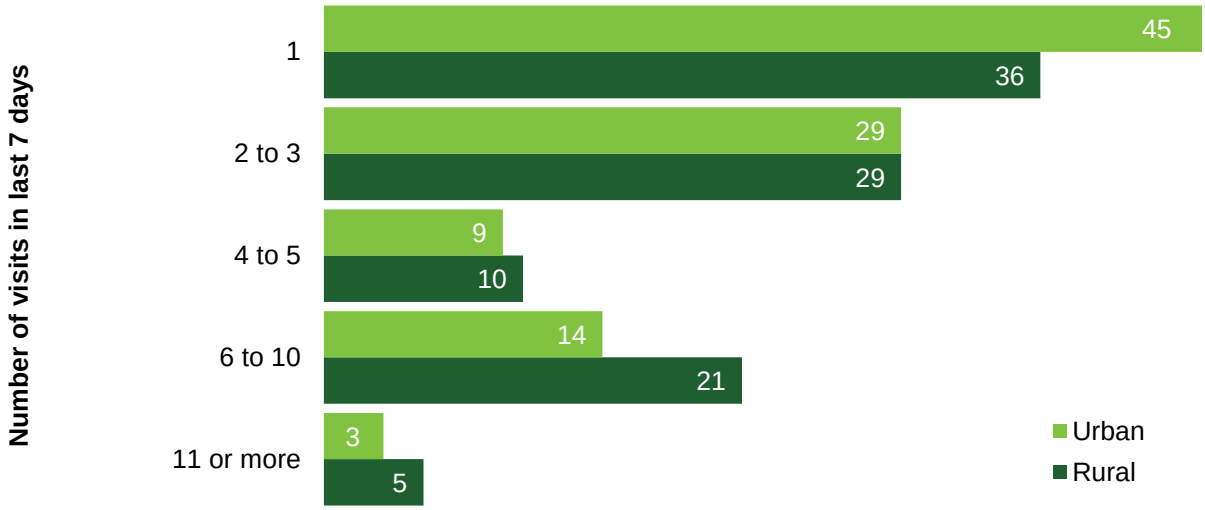


Figure 5-4 Frequency of visits in last 7 days by urban/ rural visit takers %
MENE March 2009 to February 2016, urban/ rural population who had taken any visits last 7 days, weekly question:(101,962/25,817)
Please note that, due to rounding, these figures may not equal 100%

However, there has been variation with regards to the frequency with which visits were taken in the last seven days amongst residents of urban areas. The proportion of urban residents who reported taking six to ten visits in the previous week rose from 13 per cent in 2009/10 to 16 per cent in 2015/16.

England's urban population is characterised by groups that are generally less likely to visit the natural environment

To understand more about the potential reasons behind these variations in visit behaviour and barriers to visiting, it is useful to consider the characteristics of England's urban and rural populations. It should be noted that the majority of England's adult population live in urban areas and therefore, there is a degree of overlap between the characteristics of the urban population and the findings presented relating to visits taken to urban greenspace destinations.

By analysing the demographic profiles of these populations, several differences were evident:

- *A younger age profile in urban areas* - 33 per cent aged 16-34 compared to 19 per cent of rural residents
- *A more diverse ethnic origin profile* – 16 per cent of urban residents identified as being of Black and/or Minority Ethnic origin (BAME) versus just two per cent of rural residents
- *A greater spread of social grades* – 27 per cent in the lower DE social grades in urban areas compared to two in ten rural residents
- *Fewer retirees living in urban areas* – 22 per cent compared to 33 per cent in rural areas.
- *A lower level of dog ownership* – 21 per cent of urban residents owned a dog versus 32 per cent in rural areas
- *A lower level of ownership/access to a car/van* – 71 per cent amongst urban compared to 87 per cent of rural residents

The higher proportion of older residents in rural areas also links in with the increased likelihood of old age or health issues being cited as barriers to visiting amongst this population.

Access to urban greenspaces is important from a social equity perspective - reaching groups that generally exhibit a lower propensity to visit and those less likely to take visits further afield. Several groups identified as more likely to appear in the urban population (compared to the rural population) are those identified for MENE as a whole to be less likely to have taken a visit to the outdoors in the last seven days namely:

- 16-34s

- Those of BAME origin
- DEs
- Those not in paid employment
- Those who do not own a dog

Table 5-2 Demographic profile of England's urban/ rural populations
MENE March 2009 to February 2016, total urban/rural population, weekly question: (265,419/52,989)

		Proportion of population	
		Urban (%)	**Rural (%)**
Age	16-34	**33***	19
	35-54	34	34
	55+	33	**47***
Ethnicity	White	84	98
	BAME	**16***	2
Social grade	AB	23	**32***
	C1	29	27
	C2	21	21
	DE	**27***	20
Working status	Working	57	54
	Retired	22	**33***
	Other not working	**20***	12
Dog ownership	Own a dog	21	**32***
	No dog	79	68
Car/ van access	Have access	71	**87***
	No access	29	13

Note: Figures in bold and with an asterisk are significantly different when compared with the other population group e.g. the proportion of 16-34 year olds is significantly higher amongst urban residents compared to the rural population

Participation in protecting the natural environment is lower in urban areas

MENE measures participation in several pro-environmental behaviours to determine the action taken by the general population to conserve the natural environment.

Overall, residents of urban areas are less likely than rural residents to state that they undertake any of the pro-environmental behaviours featured in MENE (88 per cent and 93 per cent respectively). As the analysis undertaken did not control for other demographic factors (e.g. age, social grade), it is not possible to attribute this behaviour solely to living in an urban area.

Significant variations can be seen for several actions, most notably buying seasonal/locally grown food (undertaken by 35 per cent of urban residents compared to 55 per cent of rural residents) and recycling (75 per cent and 83 per cent respectively).

While levels of participation in many of the behaviours have remained relatively consistent over time, there has been an increase in the proportion of the urban population choosing to walk/cycle rather than take the car (40 per cent in 2009/10 rising to 47 per cent in 2015/16).

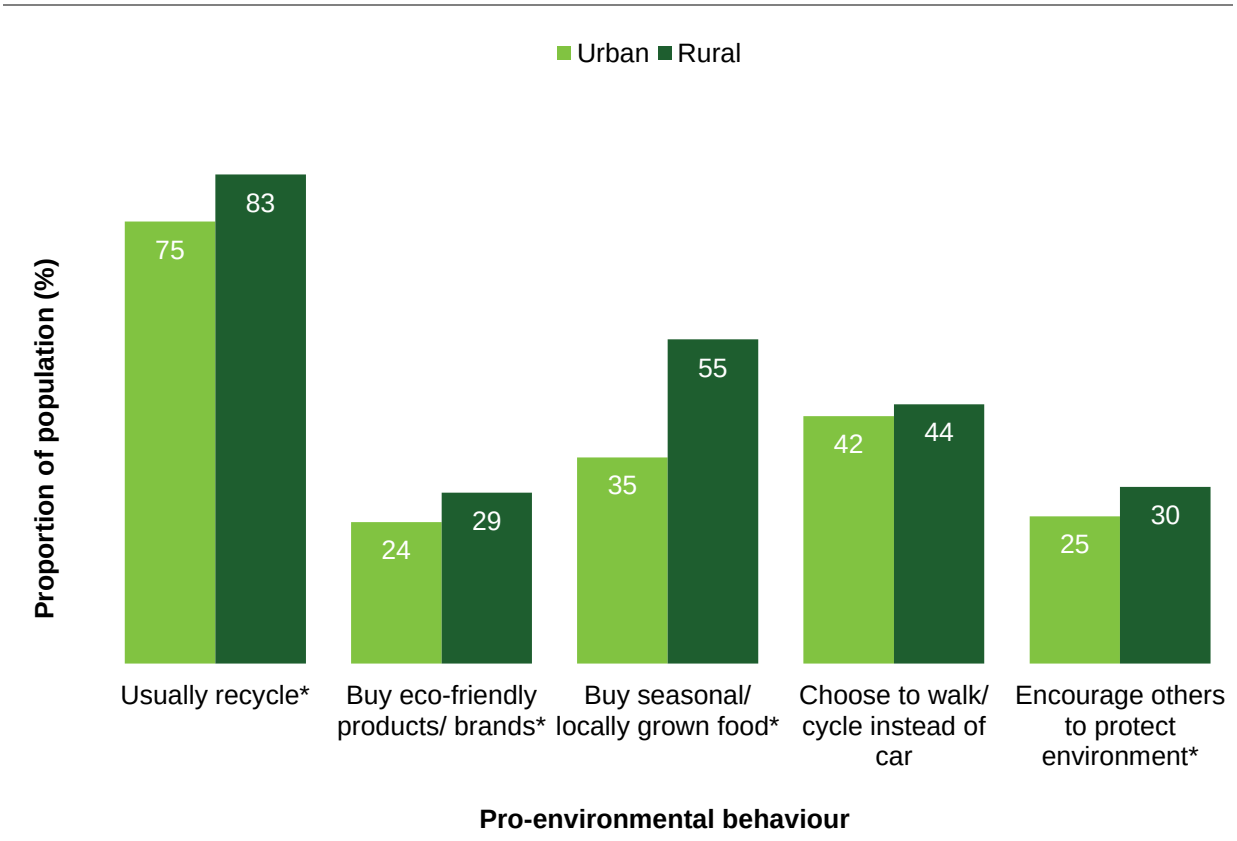


Figure 5-5 Participation in pro-environmental behaviours by urban/ rural population %

MENE March 2009 to February 2016, total urban/rural population, quarterly question: (20,356/3,846)
Only those mentioned by 10% or more of both populations shown
* = significant difference between populations

6 Increasingly used and locally accessed urban greenspaces

Urban greenspaces are being increasingly utilised

Between March 2009 and February 2016, the English adult population took an estimated 20.1 billion visits to the outdoors. Of these visits, an estimated 8.7 billion were taken to the greenspaces within towns and cities[14].

Between March 2015 and February 2016, almost half of visits to the natural environment were taken to greenspaces within towns and cities (47 per cent), a figure which has risen from 41 per cent in 2009/10 and which has in recent years, overtaken the proportion of visits recorded for countryside areas (43 per cent in 2015/16). What is not clear from the survey data is whether the increase is due to population increases, more people taking visits or a combination of these factors.

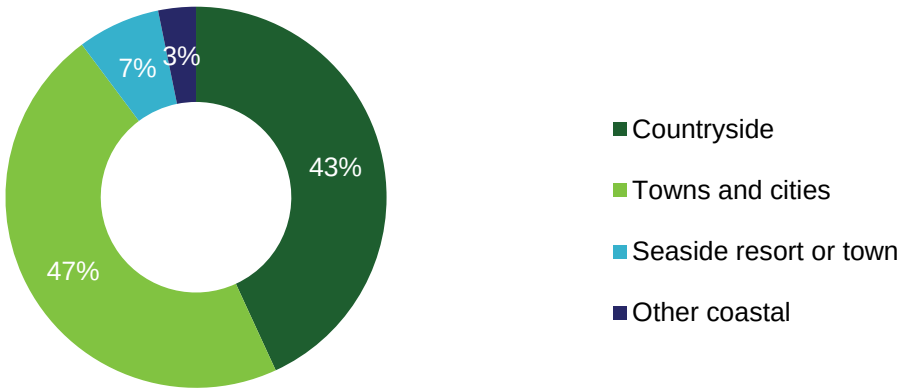


Figure 6-1 Distribution of visits to the natural environment by main type of place visited
MENE March 2015 to February 2016, all visits, weekly question: (56,097)

The increase in visits to urban greenspaces is perhaps more clearly illustrated by looking at the estimated volume of visits to each of the main types of destination visited, as shown in Figure 6-2 overleaf. This demonstrates the extent of the increased use of urban greenspaces, with an estimated 1.16 billion visits taken to this type of destination in 2009/10 compared to 1.45 billion in 2015/16.

Urban greenspaces are increasingly utilised resources, a finding which has implications for a range of areas including urban planning and health (more on this later). While visits to coastal areas and the countryside have remained relatively stable over time, visits to urban greenspaces have shown a much more notable variation with a steep increase, particularly between 2010/11 and 2015/16.

[14] Please note that the data in this chapter refers to all visits taken, not just those taken by urban residents.

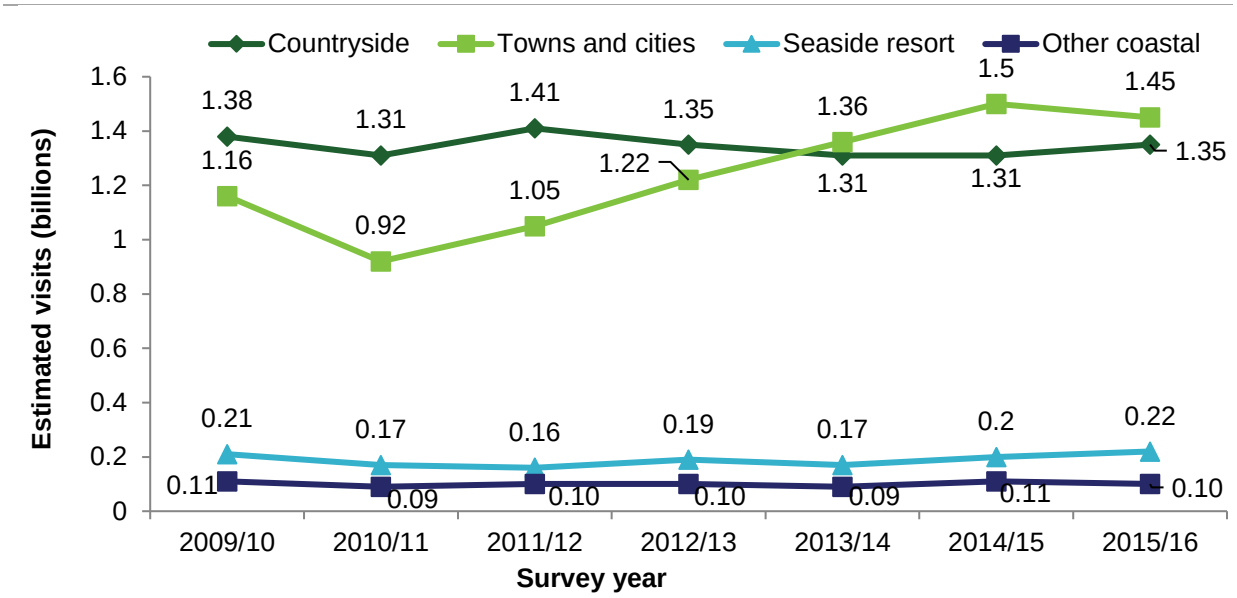


Figure 6-2 Estimated volume of visits to the natural environment by main type of place visited
MENE March to February, all visits, weekly question: 2009/10 (58,653); 2010/11 (47,825); 2011/12 (53,898); 2012/13 (53,208); 2013/14 (55,897); 2014/15 (55,573); 2015/16 (55,097)

Urban greenspaces are cross-seasonal and continuously utilised resources

Visits to urban greenspaces have shown less volatility across the seasons than those taken to other destination types (as illustrated in the indexed data in Figure 6-3 below), which may be reflective of the types of activities and/or the purposes behind such visits. Visits to seaside/coastal areas in particular show much more seasonal variation, with a bias towards the spring and summer months, while countryside visits tend to dip more in the spring months.

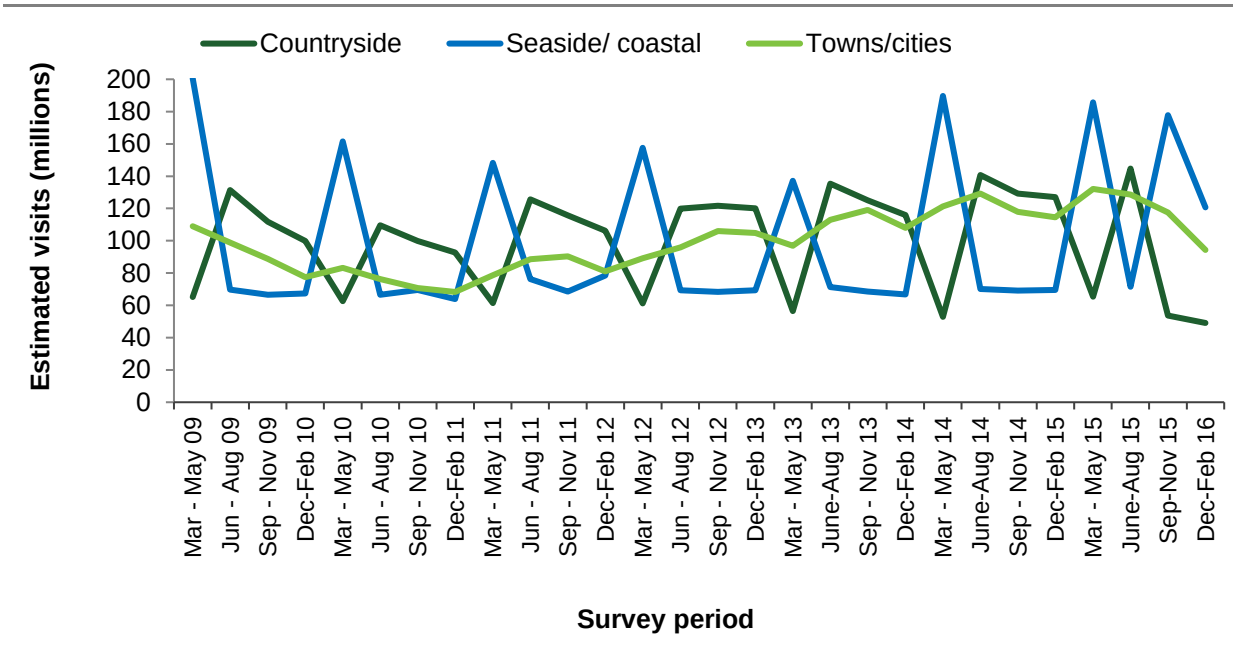


Figure 6-3 Quarterly volume of visits by destination type – indexed data 100=monthly average over 6 year period %
MENE March to February, all visits, weekly question: 2009/10 (58,653); 2010/11 (47,825); 2011/12 (53,898); 2012/13 (53,208); 2013/14 (55,897); 2014/15 (55,573); 2015/16 (55,097)

This data also shows the overall increase in visits taken to urban areas, which combined with the less volatile nature of the volume of visits taken, shows these areas to be well and continuously utilised spaces for outdoor recreation.

When analysed by the day of the week on which visits took place, a reasonably even spread can be seen for visits to urban greenspaces. Across all destination types, there is a bias towards the weekend, however, a smaller proportion of visits were taken to urban greenspaces on Sundays compared to other destinations, with urban visits more evenly distributed throughout the week.

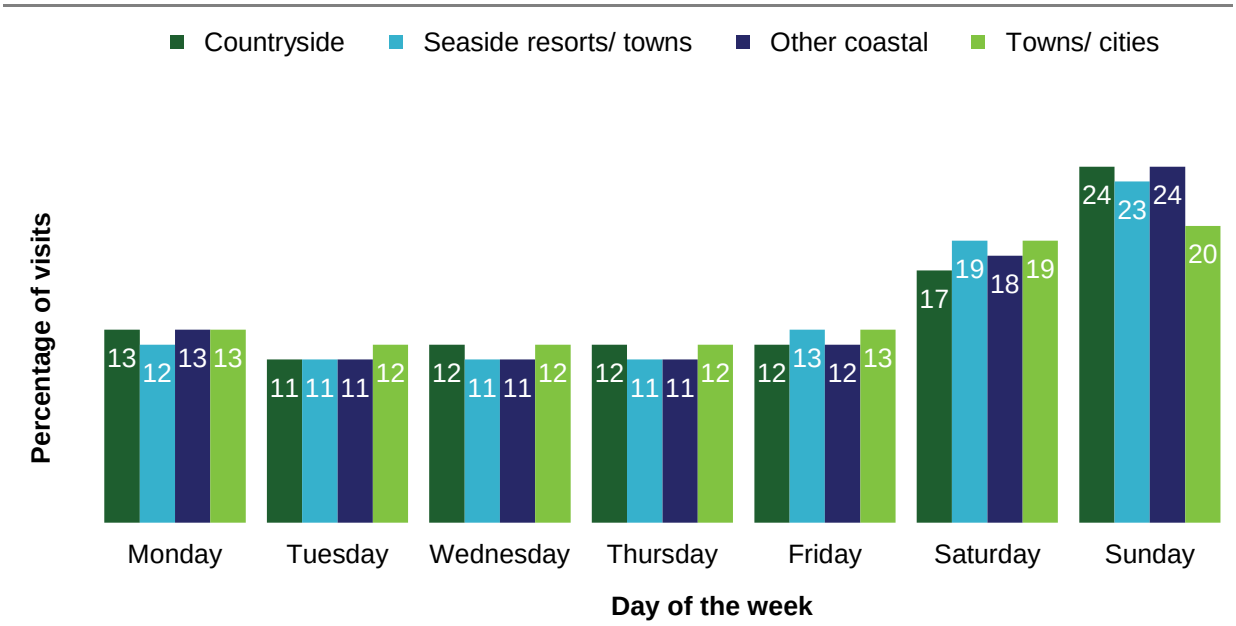


Figure 6-4 Daily proportion of visits by destination type %

MENE March to February, randomly selected visits (unweighted data), weekly question: towns/ cities (61,856), seaside resorts/ towns (11,091), other coastal (4,631), countryside (53,273)

Significant increases in urban greenspace visits taken that included walking as the mode of transport (2009/10 to 2015/16):
16-34s
Men
C1s
Those in paid employment

Urban greenspace visits are likely to be taken locally

A defining characteristic of visits to urban greenspaces is that they are more likely to be taken by people who live locally than visits to other destinations (see Table 6-1 below).

Half of visits taken to greenspaces within towns and cities involved a journey of less than 1 mile to reach the visit destination (50 per cent), while a further quarter were taken 1 to 2 miles from the visit start point (25 per cent).

In contrast, around a quarter of visits taken to seaside resorts/towns (27 per cent) and two in every ten visits taken to other coastal areas (21 per cent) involved a journey of 11 miles or more from the start point to reach the destination visited.

Table 6-1 Distance travelled by main place visited

MENE March 2009 to February 2016, randomly selected visit, weekly question: towns/ cities (61,856), seaside resorts/ towns (11,091), other coastal (4,631), countryside (53,273)

	Proportion of visits			
	Countryside (%)	Towns/ cities (%)	Seaside resorts/ towns (%)	Other coastal (%)
Less than 1 mile	36	50	29	26
1 to 2 miles	27	25	24	27
3 to 5 miles	18	13	12	17
6 to 10 miles	8	5	7	9
11 miles or more	11	7	27	21
Average distance travelled (miles)	*6.0*	*4.4*	*15.0*	*20.5*

The pattern of a high proportion of local visits being taken to urban greenspaces has been consistent throughout the course of MENE. Over time, the average distance travelled has decreased for these visits from an average of 5.2 miles in 2009/10 to 4.2 in 2014/15 and 2015/16.

The decrease in the average distance travelled has been accompanied by an increase in the proportion of visits taken to urban greenspaces on foot, as shown in Figure 6-5 overleaf. Around seven in ten visits to urban greenspaces were taken on foot in 2015/16 (69 per cent), compared to 64 per cent in 2009/10.

This variation has been accompanied by a decrease in the use of cars/vans to reach the visit destination, illustrating the health and also conservation benefits of local visits to urban greenspaces.

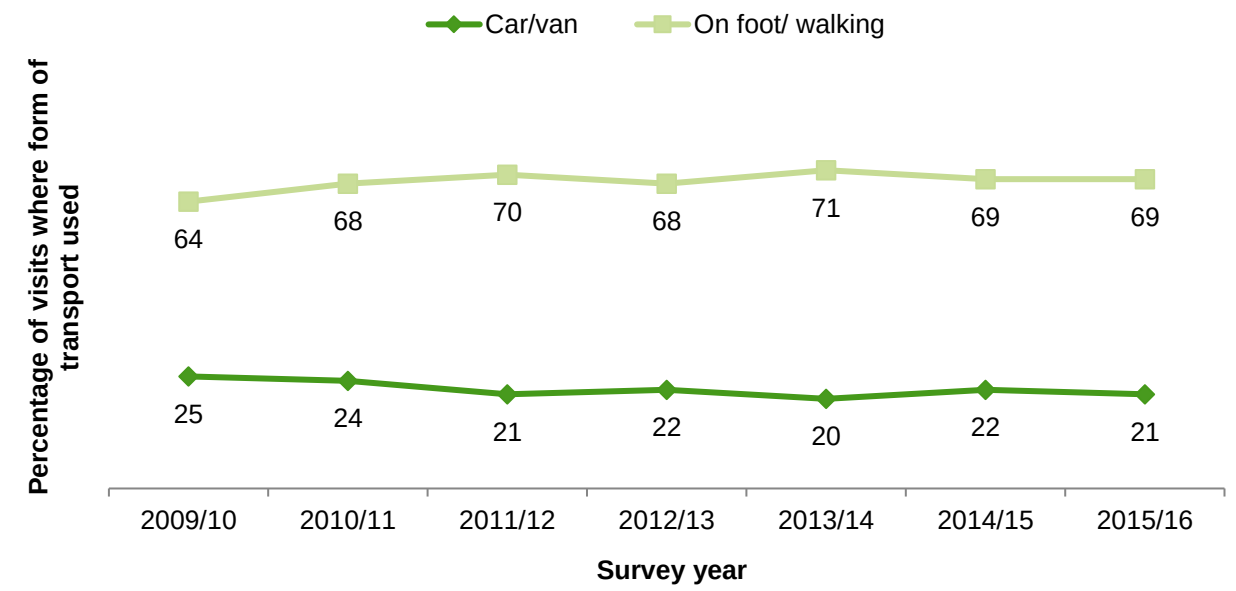


Figure 6-5 Main mode of transport used on visits to urban greenspaces by survey year %

MENE March to February, randomly selected visits to towns/ cities, weekly question: 2009/10 (8,996); 2010/11 (7,314); 2011/12 (8,250); 2012/13 (8,772); 2013/14 (9,370); 2014/15 (9,833); 2015/16 (9,321)

Over the course of the survey, significant increases between 2009/10 and 2015/16 in the proportions of urban greenspace visits where the destination was reached on foot were taken by:

- *Those aged 16-34* - 62 per cent to 68 per cent
- *Men* - 61 per cent to 68 per cent
- *Those in the C1 social grade* - 60 per cent to 69 per cent
- *Those in paid employment* - 62 per cent to 67 per cent. This group were also more likely than the average to include children in their party (see later).

The more local nature of urban greenspace visits is likely to be as a result of a combination of factors including the profile of urban greenspace visitors and how these spaces are used (see section 7).

It is also possible that this is reflective of the availability and accessibility of local greenspaces for the urban population.

Visits to urban greenspaces are more likely to be taken alone

An average of six in ten visits to urban greenspaces were taken alone, while visits to coastal areas were more likely to be taken with others.

Visits taken alone to urban greenspaces were more likely to be taken by those aged 55 and over (66 per cent), those who were retired (65 per cent) and those in the DE social grades (64 per cent).

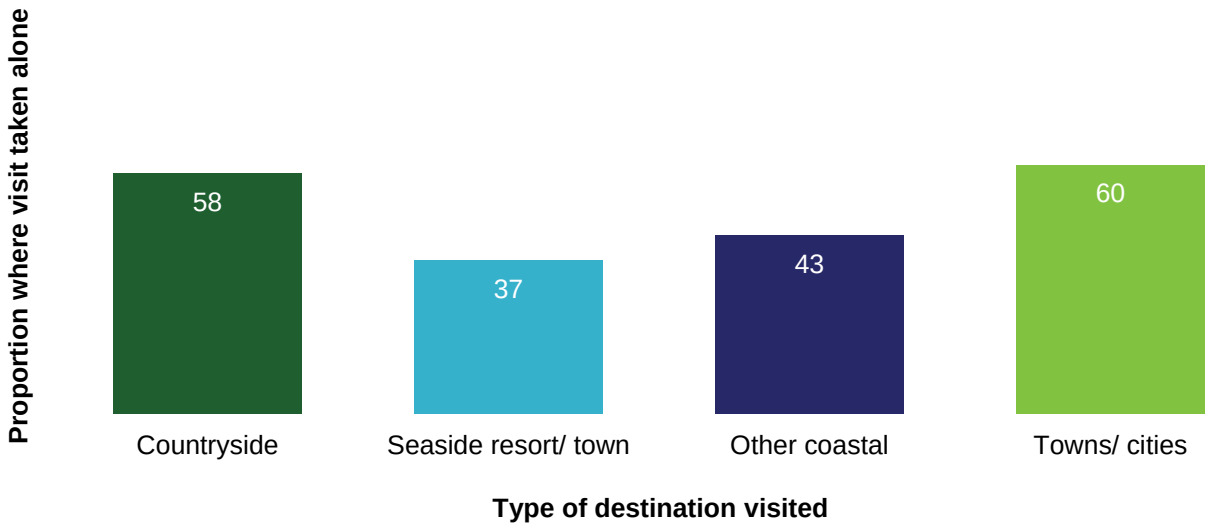


Figure 6-6 Proportion of visits taken alone by main place visited %

MENE March 2009 to February 2016, randomly selected visits, monthly question: towns/ cities (21,307), seaside resorts/ towns (3,589), other coastal (1,530), countryside (17,611)

As shown in Figure 6-7 (below), a quarter of visits to urban greenspaces were taken with children in the party (25 per cent), with only seaside resorts/ towns recording a higher proportion (28 per cent).

In addition, as shown later, urban greenspace visits were more likely to be taken for the purpose of entertaining children than those taken to other areas. Given the higher number of urban greenspace visits taken, this highlights the benefits of these places for a range of age groups and as a potential opportunity to connect children with nature.

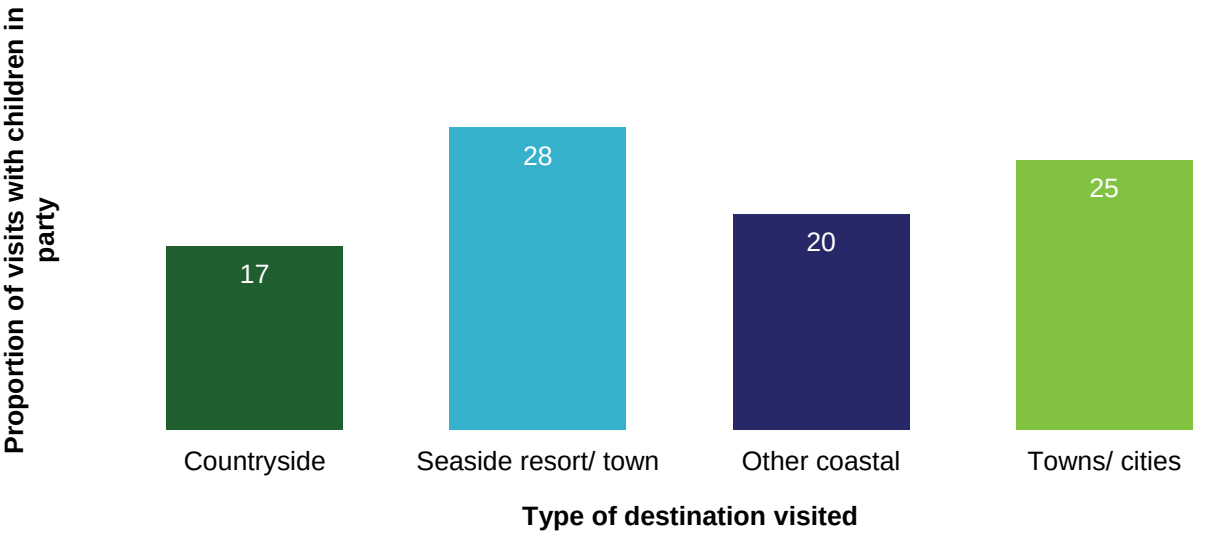


Figure 6-7 Proportion of visits taken with children in party %

MENE March 2015 to February 2016, randomly selected visits, monthly question: towns/ cities (21,307), seaside resorts/ towns (3,589), other coastal (1,530), countryside (17,611)

Over the course of MENE, visits taken by several population groups to urban greenspaces have been shown to be more likely than visits to other destinations to include children in the party including those taken by members of the BAME population (40 per cent), those not in paid employment (35 per cent), those aged 54 and under (32 per cent) and women (30 per cent).

Estimated expenditure on visits to urban greenspace is high

When interpreting spend data, it should be noted that the information collected through MENE may not directly relate to the visit taken or be as a result of the visit alone (see the Appendix in section 10 for more details on interpreting MENE spend data). The absolute amounts reported are perhaps a proxy for the overall scale of economic activity generated by visits as the survey only captures immediate / direct expenditure.

Overall in 2015/16, some form of expenditure was recorded for around a quarter visits to urban greenspaces (26 per cent) – a similar proportion to countryside visits (23 per cent) but lower than for coastal visits (52 per cent seaside resorts/ towns and 33 per cent for other coastal visits).

The average amount spent during visits to urban greenspaces in 2015/16 was £5.35 (including visits where nothing was spent) with an annual average spend estimate for this period of £7.9m. Food and drink was the most common area of expenditure recorded.

Table 6-2 Expenditure by main place visited

MENE March 2009 to February 2016, randomly selected visit, monthly question: towns/ cities (2,220), seaside resorts/ towns (358), other coastal (140), countryside (1,592)

	Proportion of visits			
	Countryside	**Towns/ cities**	**Seaside resorts/ towns**	**Other coastal**
Proportion of visits involving any spend	23%	26%	52%	33%
Average spend (inc. zeros)	£5.21	£5.35	£21.16	£7.72
Estimated average annual expenditure (inc. zeros)	£7.0m	£7.9m	£4.3m	£0.9 m

7 Uses of urban greenspaces – who and why?

Please note that throughout this chapter, data for residents of urban areas and the adult population of England as a whole has been presented for comparison.

Urban greenspace visits are, for some, a potential source of physical activity not accessed elsewhere

MENE records participation in any physical activity of sufficient intensity to have a health impact[15] (covering both indoor and outdoor recreation (as shown in Figure 7-1 below). It is important to note that the physical activity recorded may have been undertaken at places other than the natural environment, such as gyms or at home. The level of physical activity recorded by visitors to urban greenspaces was higher than that recorded for the overall adult population of England where four in ten respondents had not undertaken any physical activity in the last week that was enough to raise their breathing rate (26 per cent for visits to urban greenspaces).

The majority (four-fifths) of England's population live in urban areas, meaning that the profile of these areas is very similar to that recorded for England as a whole and that a similar proportion of all urban residents do not exercise at a sufficient level for any health benefit at all (40 per cent). It may be that for some urban residents, visits to the natural environment are the only opportunity taken where there is the potential for some level of physical health benefit.

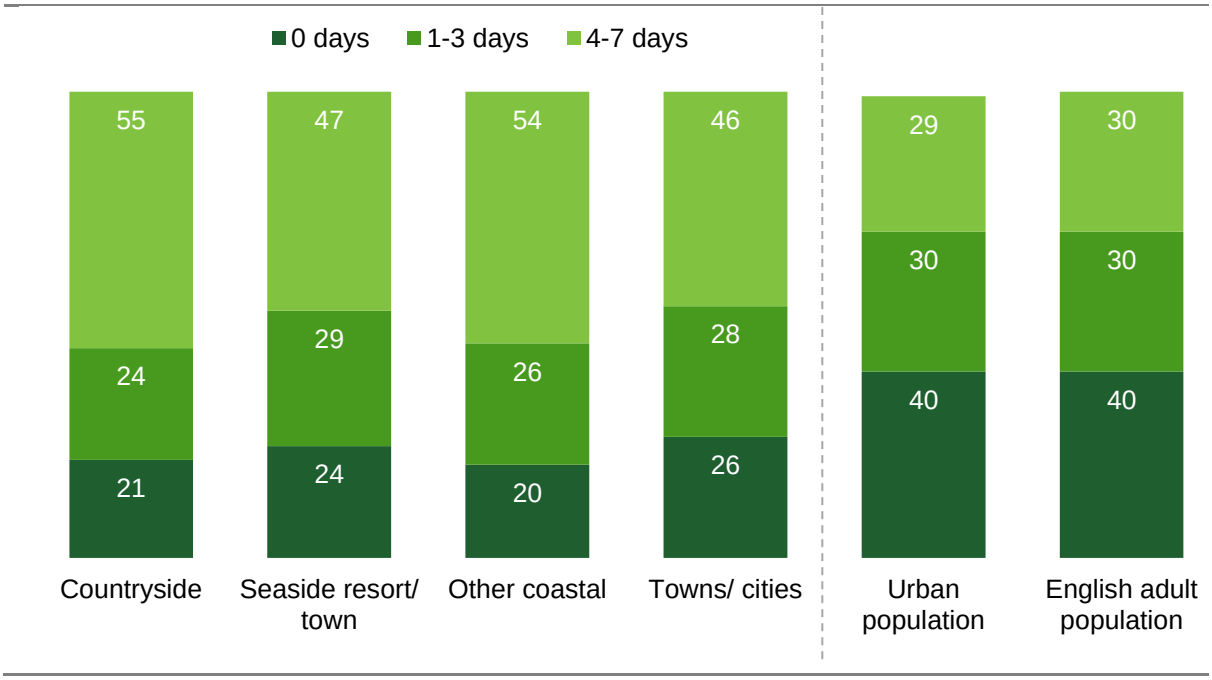


Figure 7-1 Physical activity (number of days where breathing rate increased through physical activity) level profile of visitors by main place visited %

MENE March 2009 to February 2016, all visits, weekly question: countryside (53,273); seaside resorts/ towns (11,091); other coastal (4,631); towns/ cities (61,586); total English adult population data (including non-visit takers): (326,755 respondents)

Greater utilisation of urban greenspaces by groups often under-represented elsewhere

As shown in Figure 7-2 (overleaf), the age profile for visits to urban greenspaces differs from those recorded for other types of place visited, with an even age spread that is closer to the overall population profile.

[15] Enough to raise breathing levels

Around a third of urban greenspace visits were taken by those between the ages of 16 and 34 (33 per cent), a similar proportion to the overall adult population of England[16] (31 per cent) but higher than for other destinations, particularly the countryside and other coastal areas (19 per cent each).

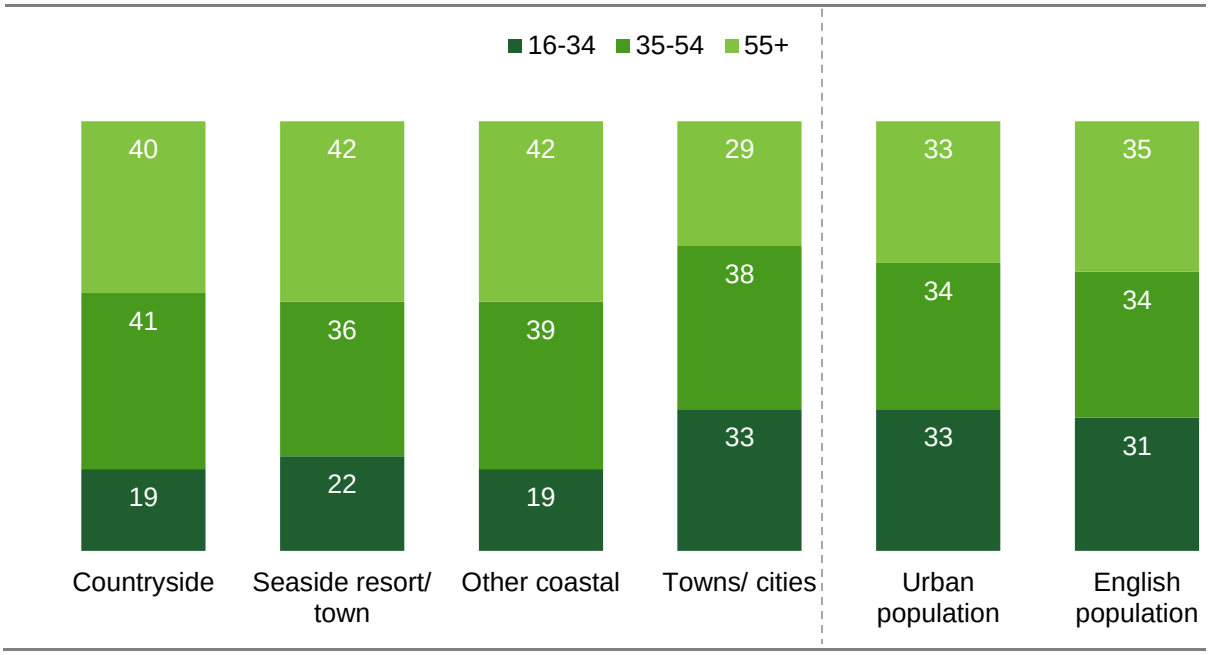


Figure 7-2 Age profile of visitors by main place visited %

MENE March 2009 to February 2016, all visits, weekly question: countryside (53,273); seaside resorts/ towns (11,091); other coastal (4,631); towns/ cities (61,586); urban population (265,419); total English adult population data (including non-visit takers) (326,755 respondents)

[16] Note that references to the Urban and English adult population are based on respondent level rather than visit data

As shown below, urban greenspace visits were also more likely to be taken by those in the Black and Minority Ethnic population than to other destinations. Around one in ten urban greenspace visits were taken by members of the BAME population (11 per cent), a much closer proportion to the population as a whole (13 per cent) than for other destination types but still lower than the proportion in the urban population of England (16 per cent).

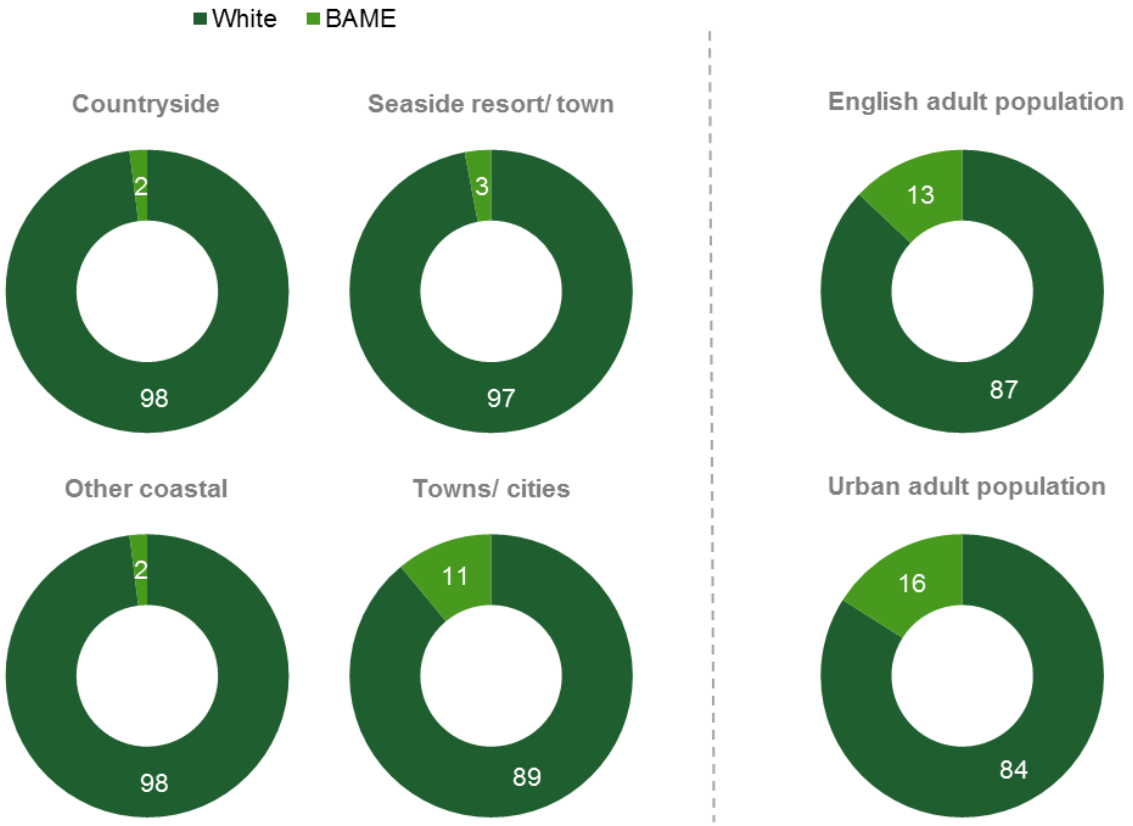


Figure 7-3 Ethnic origin profile of visitors by main place visited %

MENE March 2009 to February 2016, all visits, weekly question: countryside (53,273); seaside resorts/ towns (11,091); other coastal (4,631); towns/ cities (61,586); urban population (265,419); total English adult population data (including non-visit takers): (326,755 respondents)

The social grade profile of those taking visits to urban greenspaces was also closer to the overall population profile than other destination types, with less of a bias towards the ABC1 social grades. Over the seven years of MENE, just under half of visits to urban greenspaces were taken by those in the C2DE social grades. Visits by those in the DE social grades (23 per cent of urban greenspace visits) were significantly higher for urban greenspaces than for other destination types (as shown in Figure 7-4 below).

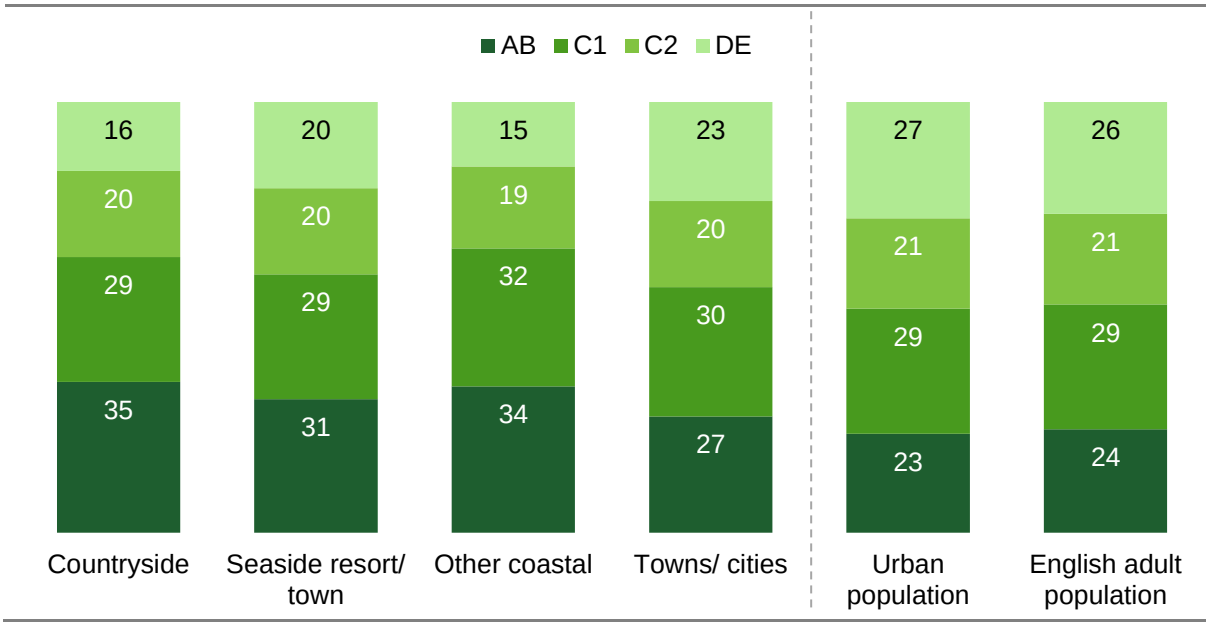


Figure 7-4 Social grade profile of visitors by main place visited %

MENE March 2009 to February 2016, all visits, weekly question: countryside (53,273); seaside resorts/ towns (11,091); other coastal (4,631); towns/ cities (61,586); urban population (265,419); total English adult population data (including non-visit takers): (326,755 respondents)

While a higher proportion of visits to towns and cities were taken by those in the DE social grades, this proportion is lower than the proportion of urban residents overall that are in this group (23 per cent and 27 per cent respectively).

Visits to urban greenspaces also show some variation from other destination types with regards to working status. 21 per cent of urban visits were taken by those who were not working (those not in paid employment but not retired) compared to 15 per cent of seaside resort/ town visits and 13 per cent of countryside and other coastal visits.

While not all visits to urban greenspaces are taken by those living in urban areas, a high proportion are. It is perhaps therefore unsurprising that the proportion of visits taken by those not in paid employment (21 per cent) is very close to that for the urban population overall (20 per cent).

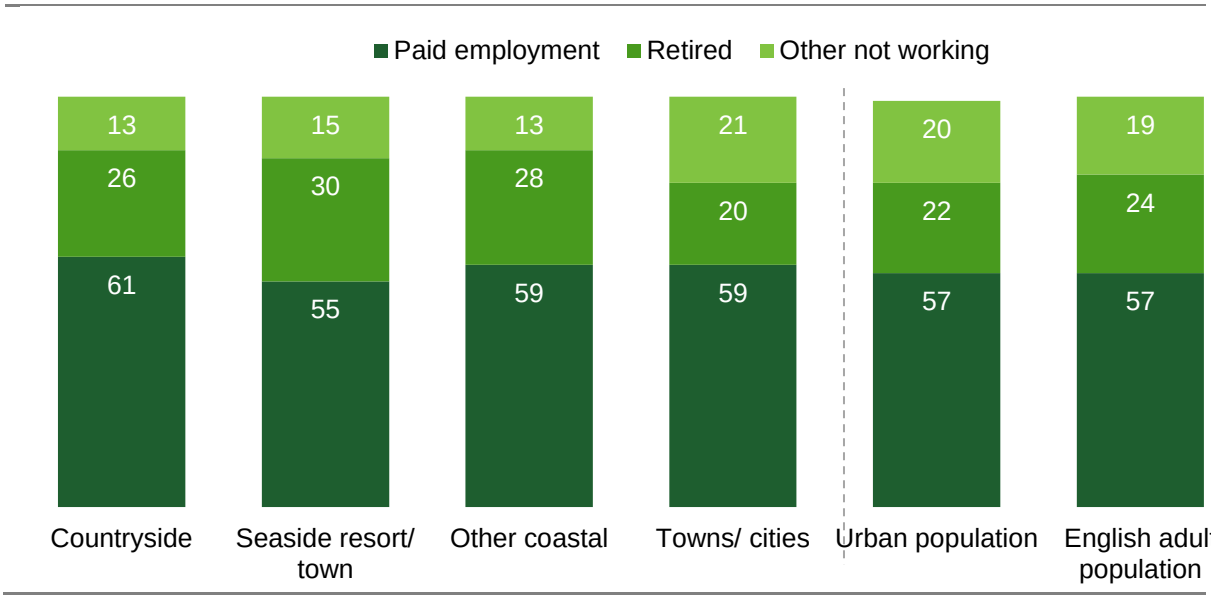


Figure 7-5 Working status profile of visitors by main place visited %

MENE March 2009 to February 2016, all visits, weekly question: countryside (53,273); seaside resorts/ towns (11,091); other coastal (4,631); towns/ cities (61,586); urban population (265,419); total English adult population data (including non-visit takers) : (326,755 respondents)

Urban greenspace visits also differ by the level of access to a car or van. At 75 per cent, the level of vehicle access recorded for visits taken to urban greenspaces was almost identical to the population overall (74 per cent) but lower than for all other destination types, where access to a car/van was recorded for those taking upwards of four-fifths of visits.

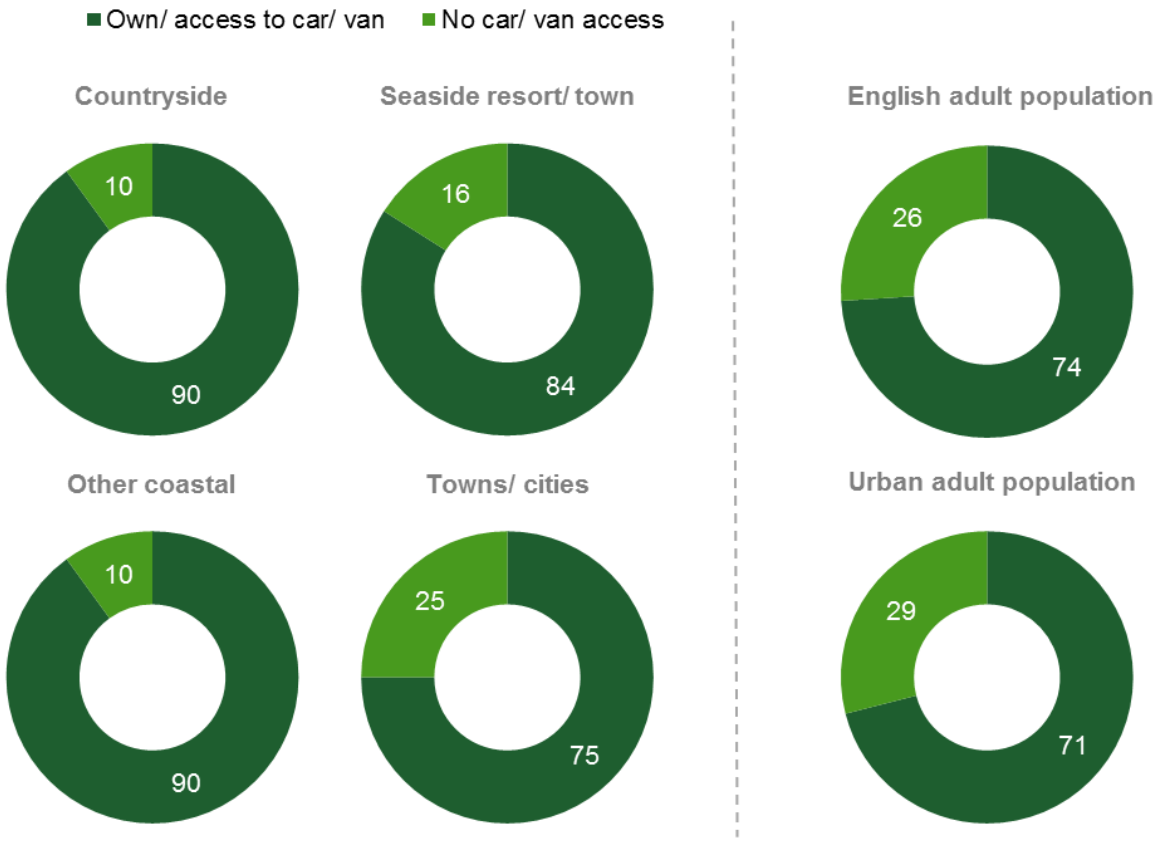


Figure 7-6 Working status profile of visitors by main place visited %

MENE March 2009 to February 2016, all visits, weekly question: countryside (53,273); seaside resorts/ towns (11,091); other coastal (4,631); towns/ cities (61,586); urban population (265,419); total English adult population data (including non-visit takers): (326,755 respondents)

Around a third of visits to urban greenspaces were taken by those with children in their household (32 per cent) compared to around a quarter of those taken to other destination types.

The proportion of urban visits taken by those with children in the household is higher than the overall proportion of these households amongst the English adult population. As shown elsewhere in this report, visits to urban greenspaces were more likely to be taken for the purpose of entertaining children and to children's playgrounds compared to other destination types.

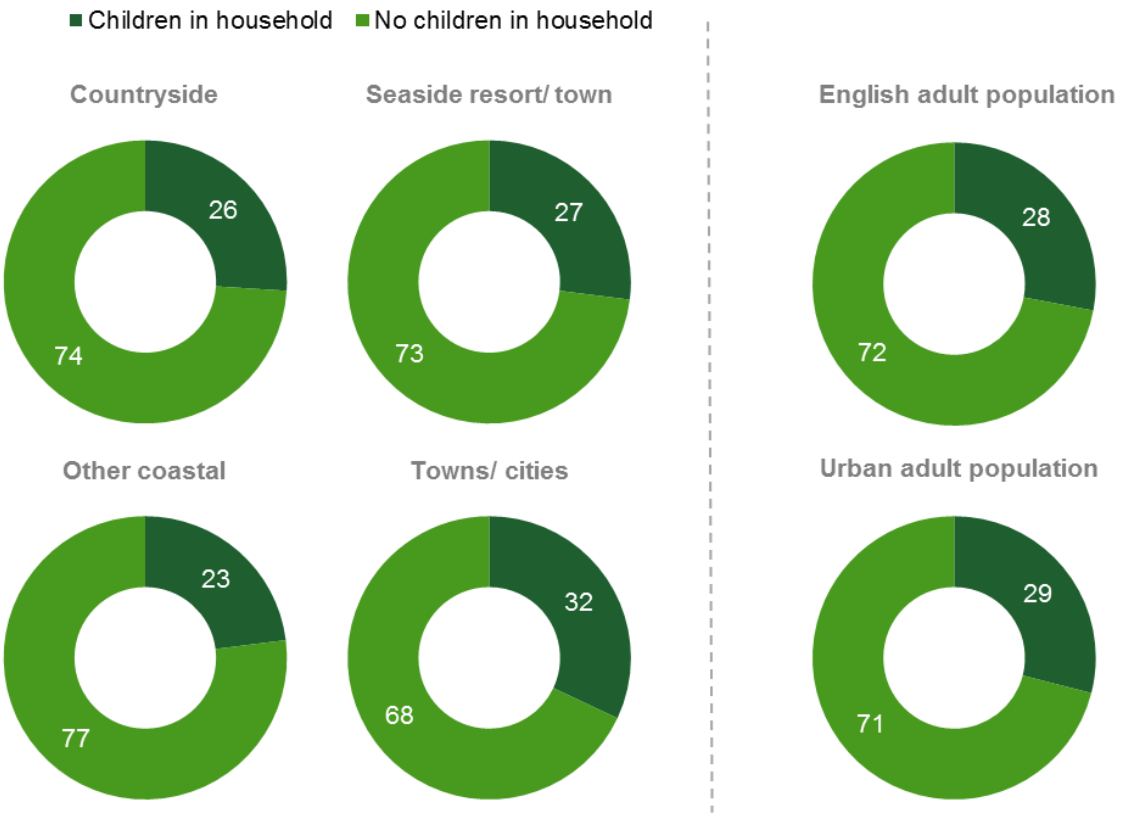


Figure 7-7 Presence of children in household - profile of visitors by main place visited %
MENE March 2009 to February 2016, all visits, weekly question: countryside (53,273); seaside resorts/ towns (11,091); other coastal (4,631); towns/ cities (61,586); urban population (265,419); total English adult population data (including non-visit takers): (326,755 respondents)

Since people in England tend to live in urban areas, it is perhaps unsurprising that these groups are more likely to visit to urban areas. It does, however, underline the importance of such spaces in providing outdoor recreation opportunities that these groups may not make use of, or possibly be able to access, in other environments.

The impact of population changes are reflected in the social grade profile of urban visits

When analysed over time, there has been some variation by social grade with a decrease in the proportion of visits taken by those in the DE social grades over time, from 28 per cent in 2009/10 to 20 per cent in 2015/16. This has been accompanied by an overall increase in the proportion of visits taken by ABs, from 23 per cent to 30 per cent.

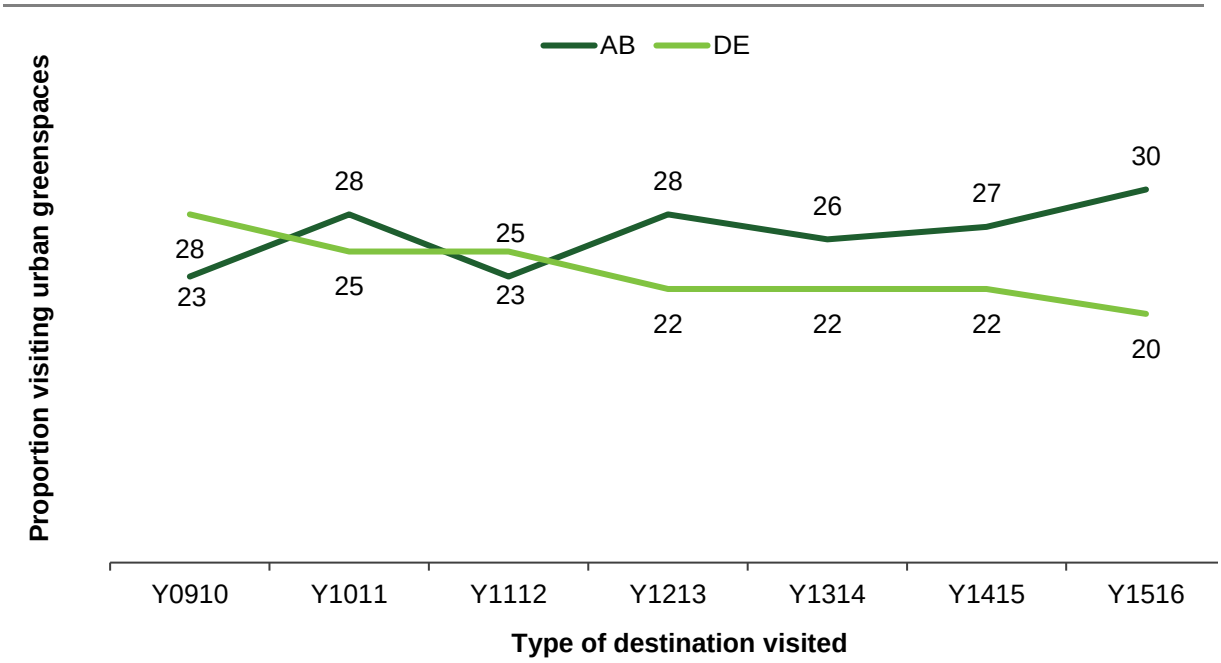


Figure 7-8 Changes to Social Grade profile of visitors to urban greenspaces by survey year %
MENE March to February, all visits to towns/ cities, weekly question: 2009/10 (24,328); 2010/11 (18,304); 2011/12 (21,324), 2012/13 (23,880); 2013/14 (26,839); 2014/15 (27,959); 2015/16 (26,868)

These variations in visit-taking have coincided with an overall increase amongst the English adult population of three percentage points for ABs and a decrease of four percentage points in the proportion of DEs. Given that ABs take an average of two visits to the outdoors per seven days compared to an average of one amongst DEs, it is likely that these overall population changes have impacted on the social grade profile of urban visits, although they are not the sole explanation for the changes recorded.

Visiting parks and short walks are the dominant uses of urban greenspace

Respondents were presented with the list of places shown below as part of the interview (along with an 'other' option). While this list has been consistent since the survey began, it is possible that using another categorisation may have indicated a greater variety of places, such as different types of urban parks, that are being visited.

Although the visit destinations selected as part of the interview are influenced by the list of places respondents can choose from in the question list, analysis has shown that urban greenspace visits typically involve a more limited range of places[17] that are visited than other general location categories such as coastal areas and the countryside[18]. It is likely that the places visited reflect those more easily accessible and readily available in urban areas. Parks in towns and cities were by far the most commonly visited destination, with 47 per cent of urban greenspace visits taken to this type of place.

Other specific destinations likely to be included in urban greenspace visits in MENE were:

- Other open spaces in towns/cities – 14 per cent of visits
- Paths/ cycleways/bridleways – 11 per cent of visits
- Playing fields/other recreation areas – nine per cent of visits

The places visited on urban greenspace visits in England have not varied significantly over the course of the survey, with parks dominant for all survey years.

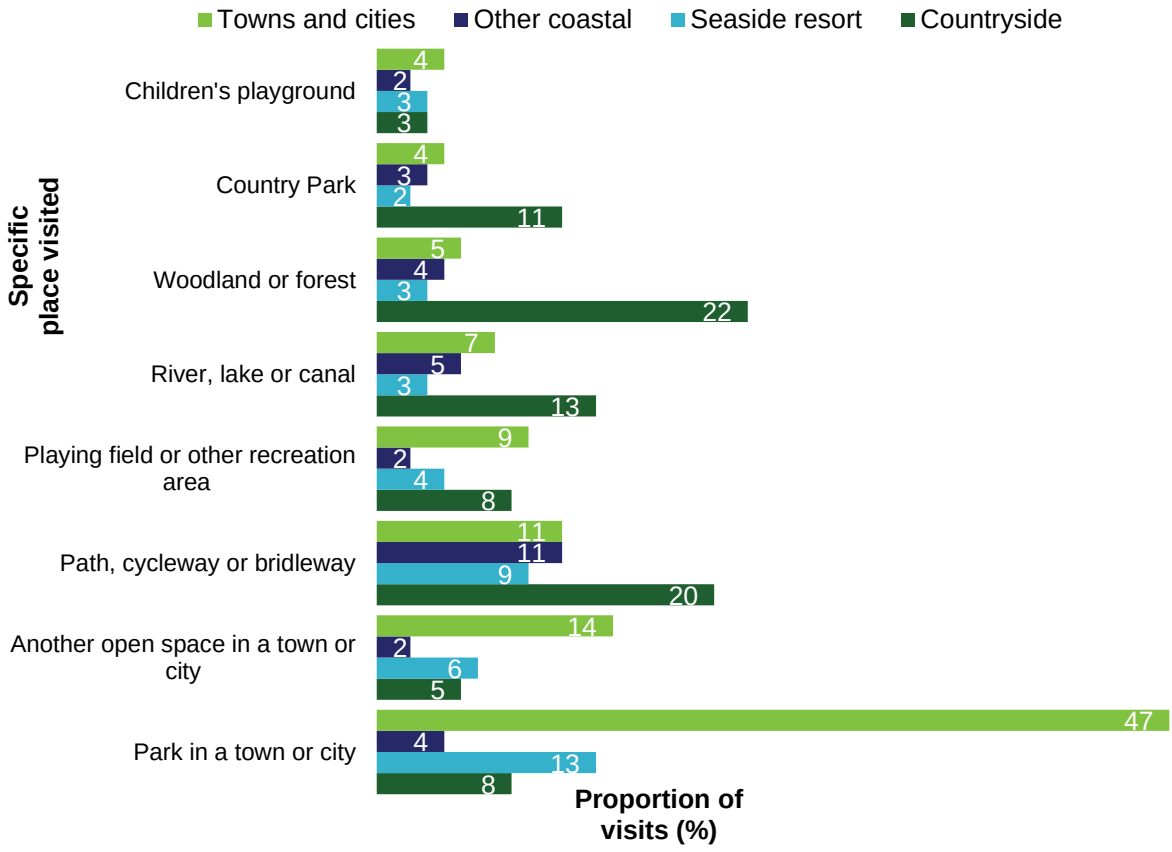


Figure 7-9 Specific place visited by main place visited %

MENE March 2009 to February 2016, randomly selected visits, weekly question: towns/ cities (61,856), seaside resorts/ towns (11,091), other coastal (4,651), countryside (53,273)
Places visited on four per cent or more of urban greenspace visits

[17] Sub-categories of urban greenspaces rather than specific geographical locations
[18] The same list of destinations was shown to all visit takers.

Below the overall population level, there were some variations recorded by the type of place visited, as shown in Table 7-1 below:

Table 7-1 Variations in places visited on urban visits

MENE March 2009 to February 2016, randomly selected visits towns/ cities, weekly question: (169,502)

	Paths/ cycleways/ bridleways	Children's playgrounds	Another open space in a town/ city
More likely to be visited by:	16-34's	Those with children in household	55 and over
	Those with children in household	16-54's v 55+	Those with no children in household
	Those not working (exc. retired)	Women v men	

In addition, urban greenspace visits taken by those of Black and Minority Ethnic (BAME) origin tended to be taken to a smaller number of places, with visits to parks higher amongst this group (64 per cent) than amongst those of White ethnic origin (43 per cent).

As for all outdoor visits, walking was the most popular activity undertaken on urban visits (see Figure 7-10 overleaf). While the majority of walking visits involved dog walking as an activity (42 per cent of visits), a further 29 per cent involved walking without a dog.

Fewer activities were undertaken on average on visits to urban greenspaces than for the other general types of places visited (coastal and countryside). However, in comparison to countryside and other coastal visits, those taken to urban greenspaces were more likely to involve playing with children (12 per cent of urban visits).

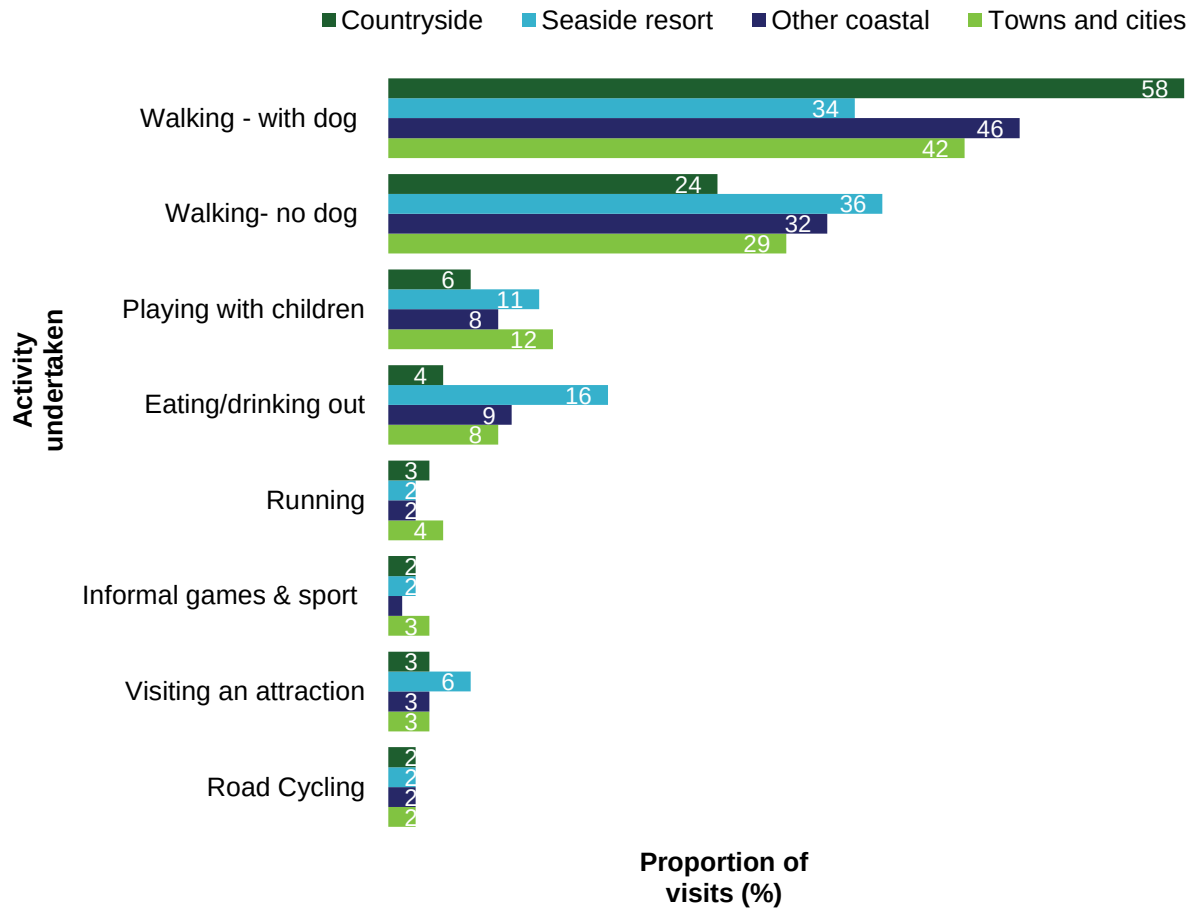


Figure 7-10 Activity undertaken by main place visited %

MENE March 2009 to February 2016, randomly selected visits, weekly question: towns/ cities (61,856), seaside resorts/ towns (11,091), other coastal (4,631), countryside (53,273)
Places visited on two per cent or more of urban greenspace visits

8 The benefits of urban greenspaces

Much has been written on the benefits of accessing greenspaces in all types of locations, including urban greenspaces. A study undertaken by a team at Exeter University concluded that moving to an area with more urban greenspace had a significant and sustained impact on the mental health of residents, with the suggestion that increasing urban greenspaces may be instrumental in delivering ongoing public health benefits[19].

Similarly, a separate research project examining self-reported mental health over time found that people who lived in urban areas with greater amounts of urban greenspace were generally happier, exhibiting lower mental distress and higher life satisfaction[20].

Urban greenspace visits deliver on positive visit outcomes but with less strength of agreement

Enjoyment is the outcome most commonly associated with visits to urban greenspaces. Strong agreement with the statement 'I enjoyed it' was recorded for 40 per cent of visits, while general agreement with this statement was expressed for a further 56 per cent of urban visits.

Although overall agreement was high with all the visit outcomes shown in Table 8-1 below, strong agreement was lower for the other outcomes, particularly feeling close to nature (18 per cent strongly agreed) and learning something new about the natural world (seven per cent strongly agreed). It is possible than the regular and perhaps more functional nature of urban greenspace visits means that while these outcomes may happen, they do so or are recognised to a lesser degree.

There have been no significant variations in agreement levels regarding visit outcomes across the seven years of MENE.

Table 8-1 Visit outcomes for visits to greenspaces in towns/cities
MENE March 2009 to February 2016, randomly selected visits towns/ cities, quarterly question: (4,519)

	Agreement regarding outcomes (visits to towns/ cities)				
	Strongly agree (%)	Agree (%)	Neither (%)	Disagree (%)	Strongly disagree (%)
I enjoyed it	40	56	3	1	0
It made me feel calm and relaxed	26	58	9	5	1
It made me feel refreshed and revitalised	27	57	10	6	1
I took time to appreciate my surroundings	23	56	11	9	1
I learned something new about the natural world	7	23	23	37	8
I felt close to nature	18	49	16	14	3

[19] 'Longitudinal effects on mental health of moving to greener and less green urban areas (2014), Ian Alcock, Mathew P. White, Benedict W. Wheeler, Lora E. Fleming, and Michael H. Depledge
https://ore.exeter.ac.uk/repository/bitstream/handle/10871/15080/es403688w_white.pdf?sequence=2&isAllowed=y

[20] 'Would you be happier living in a greener urban area?' Mathew P. White, Ian Alcock, Benedict W. Wheeler and Michael H. Depledge, Psychological Science, published online 23 April 2013
www.ecehh.org/research-projects/urban-green-space

As shown in Figure 8-1 (below), while the general pattern of agreement with each of the visit outcomes was the same across destinations, there was variation in the levels of strong agreement with each of the outcomes.

Visits taken to urban greenspaces were less likely to be associated with strong agreement for several of the statements than for other destinations, with significant variations recorded for all attitude statements when compared to seaside resort/town and countryside visits. The exception to this was 'I learned something new about the natural environment' where strong agreement was low across all destination types.

As shown later, urban visits are commonly taken for reasons such as exercising a dog and/or for personal health/exercise benefits. Visits to other destination types are more likely to be taken for the purposes of enjoying scenery or visiting somewhere a person particularly likes, indicating that these visits are perhaps less functional in nature.

It does not however, mean that these outcomes are not being achieved for urban visits or that such spaces are not able to offer these benefits.

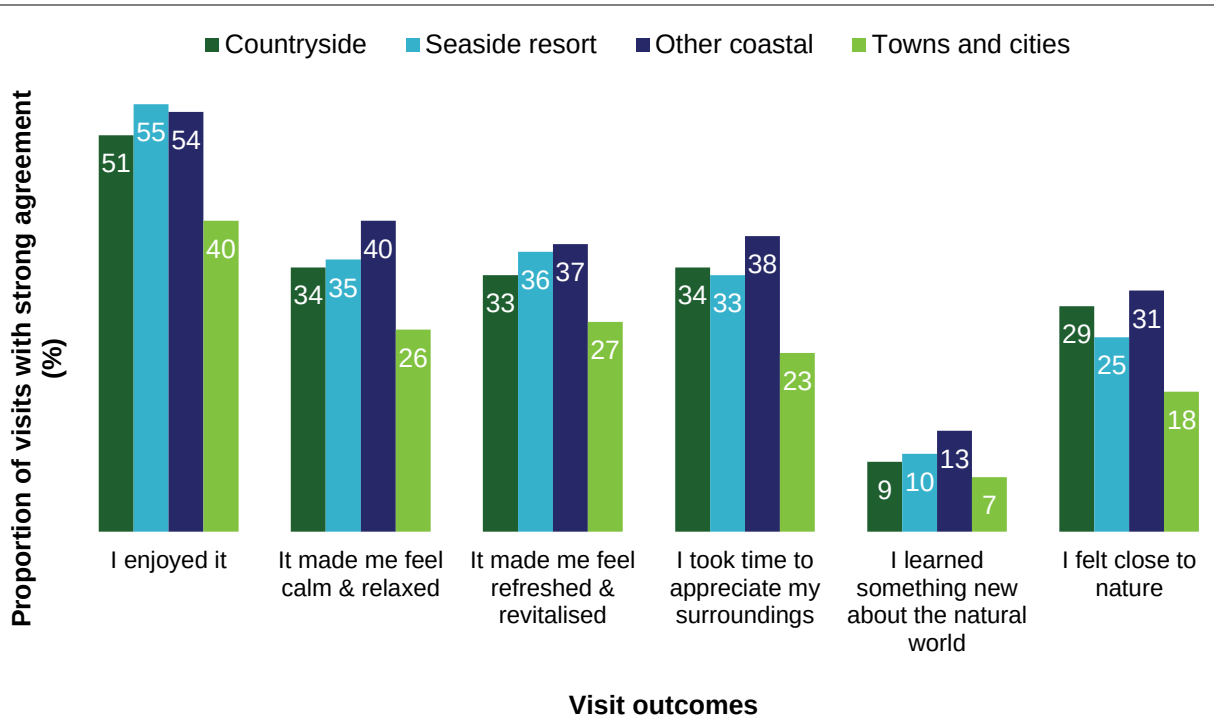


Figure 8-1 Strong agreement with visit outcomes by main place visited %

MENE March 2009 to February 2016, randomly selected visits, quarterly question: towns/ cities (4,519), seaside resorts/ towns (953), other coastal (322), countryside (4,033)

Due to the smaller sample sizes for this question, it was more difficult to detect significant variations with regards to visit outcomes for urban greenspaces below the overall population level. However, there was an interesting variation by age.

In general, those aged 55 and over were more likely than those aged 16-34 to strongly agree with the visit outcomes shown above, with significant variations recorded in strong agreement for:

- I took time to appreciate my surroundings – 55+ (29 per cent); 16-34 (18 per cent)
- I felt close to nature – 55+ (22 per cent); 16-34 (14 per cent)

Variations by age are also evident at the total level across all visits taken, indicating that this, as well as other environmental factors, may have an influence on the outcomes associated with visits to the outdoors.

Motivations for taking urban greenspace visits are diversifying

In general, a reduced range of motivations were cited for visits to urban greenspaces compared to other destination types. Amongst all urban visitors, exercising a dog (41 per cent), health/exercise (38 per cent) and/or fresh air/pleasant weather (21 per cent) were the key motivations recorded.

While health or exercise was the second most commonly cited motivation for all urban visits, this was significantly more likely to be cited for countryside visits (46 per cent compared to 38 per cent for urban greenspaces). This is not to say that urban greenspace visits do not provide such a benefit, however, it may be that this is seen as less important amongst urban visitors due to the functional nature of some of the visits taken to these areas.

Given the higher proportion of urban visits with children in the party, it is unsurprising to see that visits to urban greenspaces were more likely to be taken to entertain children, particularly compared to countryside visits (16 per cent and nine per cent respectively).

When analysed for visits that did not involve walking a dog, a similar proportion to all urban visits were taken for health or exercise (40 per cent and 58 per cent respectively). However, visits taken that did not involve walking a dog were likely to be motivated by relaxation/unwinding (29 per cent) and/or entertaining children (23 per cent), as well as by fresh air/pleasant weather (23 per cent).

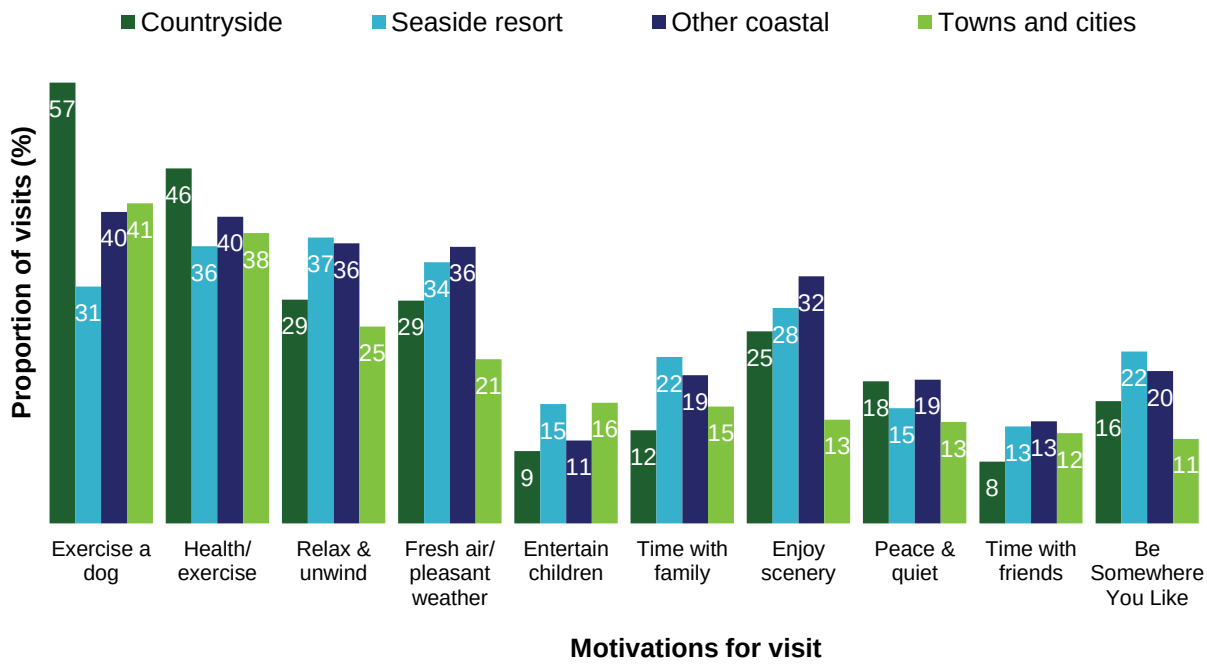
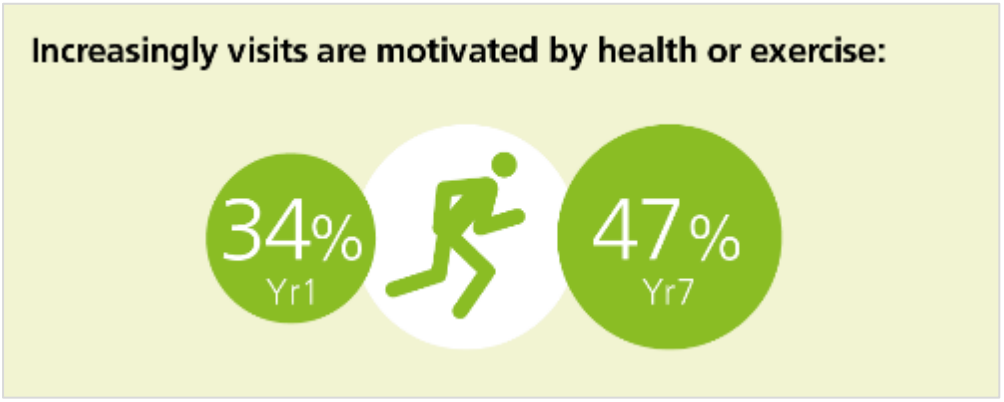


Figure 8-2 Motivations for visits by main place visited %

MENE March 2009 to February 2016, randomly selected visits, all years: towns/ cities (42,116); seaside resorts/ towns (7,226); other coastal (2,906); countryside (33,219)
Those mentioned by 10% or more shown

While the range of motivations for urban greenspace visits tends to be more limited than for other destination types overall, the range of motivations selected have increased over the years, with several motivations recording significant increases (see Table 8-2 overleaf).



* Y1 2009/10; Yr 7 2015/16

The largest increase was recorded for visits taken for health or exercise. While there have been some variations between individual years, overall, there has been a nine percentage point increase in the proportions of visits taken for this reason since 2009/10. Significant increases have also been recorded for fresh air/pleasant weather (up by eight percentage points) and to be somewhere you like (up by seven percentage points).

This suggests that while urban greenspace visits do still tend to be more functional in nature than for other destination types, motivations have become more varied over the years with these spaces being used for a range of reasons.

Table 8-2 Motivations for visits by main place visited
MENE March to February, randomly selected visits towns/cities: 2009/10 (2,067); 2015/16 (9,321)

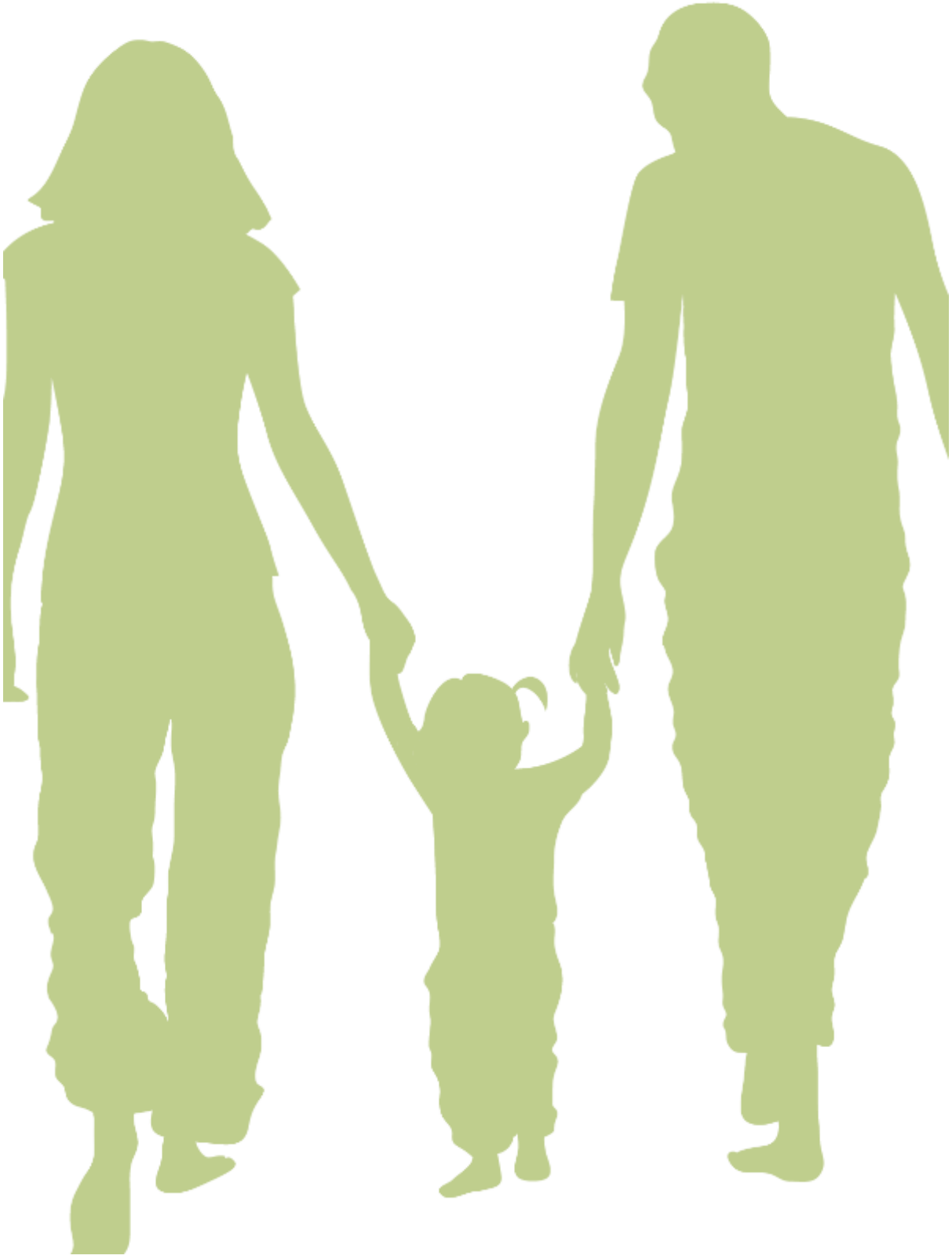
	2015/16 (%)	Percentage point difference from 2009/10
Health/ exercise*	41	*+9*
Fresh air/ pleasant weather*	23	*+8*
Be Somewhere You Like	13	*+7*
Exercise a dog*	44	*+6*
Relax & unwind	27	*+4*
Time with family	17	*+3*
Enjoy scenery	15	*+3*
Peace & quiet	13	*+2*

*Indicates a significant variation between 2009/10 and 2015/16

Over the seven years of MENE, the increase in urban greenspace visits taken for health or exercise has been recorded across various population sub-groups and indicates a general overall increase. There have, however, been some variations in the extent of the increase between 2009/10 and 2015/16 including by:

- *Gender* – visits taken by men for health or exercise have increased from 34 per cent to 47 per cent (13 percentage points) compared to an increase of five percentage points for women (30 per cent to 35 per cent
- *Social grade* – increases of 14 and 13 percentage points respectively for those in the C1 and C2 groups

- *Working status* – visits taken for health or exercise have increased by 11 percentage point for those taken by people not in paid employment (25 per cent to 36 per cent)



9 Greenspace quality & availability

Regardless of visit or pro-environmental behaviour, it is worth assessing accessibility to local greenspaces, including private gardens, as well as perceptions of the quality of these spaces to see how these spaces are viewed as well as how they are used.

Fewer people have access to private outdoor spaces in urban areas

As shown in Figure 9-1, 14 per cent of urban residents indicated that they have no access to any private outdoor space, compared to just three per cent of rural residents.

While there was little variation between these populations for access to communal gardens or other outdoors spaces, a significant variation was apparent with regards to access to private gardens (78 per cent amongst urban residents compared to 92 per cent of rural residents).

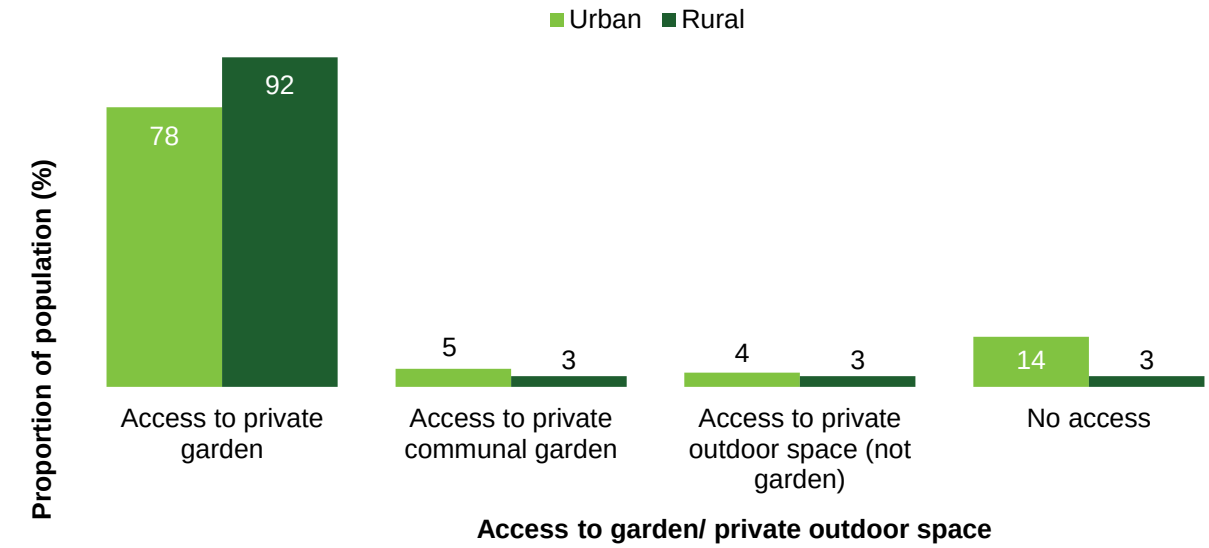


Figure 9-1 Access to private outdoor spaces – urban/rural populations %
MENE March 2013 to February 2016, total urban/ rural population, quarterly question: (6,521/1,141)

While the majority of urban residents have some access to a private outdoor space, the differences in access between England's urban and rural populations arguably strengthens the importance of communal greenspaces in urban areas. It is useful, therefore, to consider how such spaces are perceived and whether the availability and/or perceptions of urban greenspaces have the potential to be improved.

Urban residents rate their local greenspaces positively but less so than in rural areas

Table 9-1 (overleaf) shows the level of agreement with three statements designed to elicit views on the accessibility and quality of local greenspaces. As shown below, while overall agreement with these statements was high across both groups, there were variations in the strength of agreement when analysed for England's urban and rural populations.

The largest variations in strong agreement was for greenspaces being within easy walking distance and around them being of a high enough quality to want to spend time there, with a nine percentage point difference between urban and rural residents for the first of these statements (33 per cent vs 41 percent) and an 11 percentage point difference for the latter (24 per cent vs 35 per cent respectively).

While the variation regarding local greenspaces being easy to get into and around is also statistically significant, the gap was lower at seven percentage points.

Table 9-1 Agreement regarding local greenspaces – urban/ rural populations
MENE March 2013 to February 2016, total urban/rural population, quarterly question: (8,643/1,597)

		Proportion of population	
		Urban (%)	**Rural (%)**
My local greenspaces are within easy walking distance	Strongly agree	33	**41***
	Agree	54	50
	Neither	5	3
	Disagree	7	5
	Don't know	1	1
My local greenspaces are of a high enough standard to want to spend time there	Strongly agree	24	**35***
	Agree	52	50
	Neither	13	9
	Disagree	9	5
	Don't know	1	1
My local greenspaces are easy to get into and around	Strongly agree	32	**39***
	Agree	58	53
	Neither	5	4
	Disagree	4	3
	Don't know	1	1

Note: Figures in bold and with an asterisk are significantly different when compared with the other population group e.g. the proportion of rural residents strongly agreeing with each statement is significantly higher than amongst urban residents

There may be a number of reasons for these variations including differences in the overall demographic characteristics of the urban populations, less available greenspace and/or greenspace that is available but less accessible. For example, strong agreement tended to be lower for those aged 16-34 and those in the DE social grades – both groups less likely overall to take visits to the outdoors.

The aim of this report has been to explore urban greenspace data in MENE, both from the point of view of the behaviour of residents of urban areas and by looking at the characteristics of visits taken to urban areas. As acknowledged in several places, the high proportion of England's adult population living in urban areas means that there is a degree of overlap between these two areas of focus, however, there remains a lot that can be explored in relation to urban greenspaces through survey vehicles such as MENE.

10 Appendix 1 – using MENE spend data

As illustrated in Figures 10-1 and 10-2 (below and overleaf), the data on expenditure collected by MENE tells us the amount of money that people spend during a visit to the natural environment. This is different to the expense that people incur in making the visit – which is not specifically collected by MENE.

Some of the expense that is incurred – such as food, fuel and public transport – may be met through purchases made before the trip.

During the trip people may spend money on goods such as equipment, food and fuel that they use after the visit. Expenditure on car parking, admission fees and gifts and souvenirs are likely to be incurred as part of the trip.

It is also important to remember that the MENE data does not tell us where people spend money on many of the items. For example, they may purchase food and fuel from close to where they set off from, on the way or at the place that they visit.

Also people may undertake their visit to the natural environment as part of a trip that includes other activities such as visiting a relative. Additional information is needed if we are to attribute expenditure specifically to visits to the natural environment.

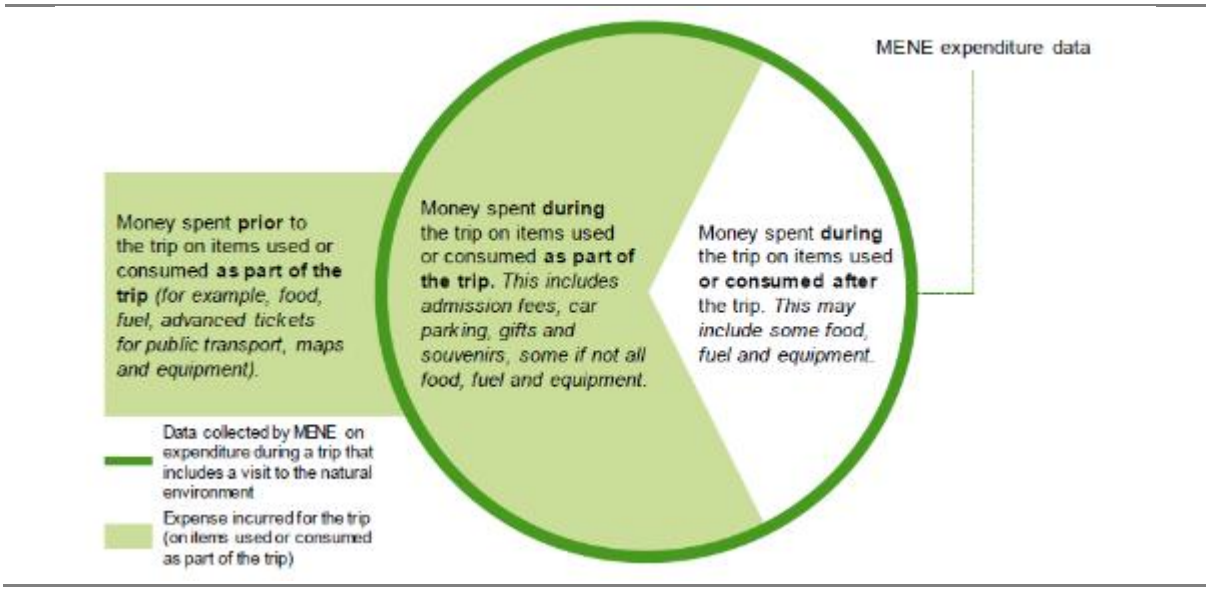


Figure 10-1 Conceptual diagram of how expenditure on items used or consumed for a trip relates to expenditure during a trip.

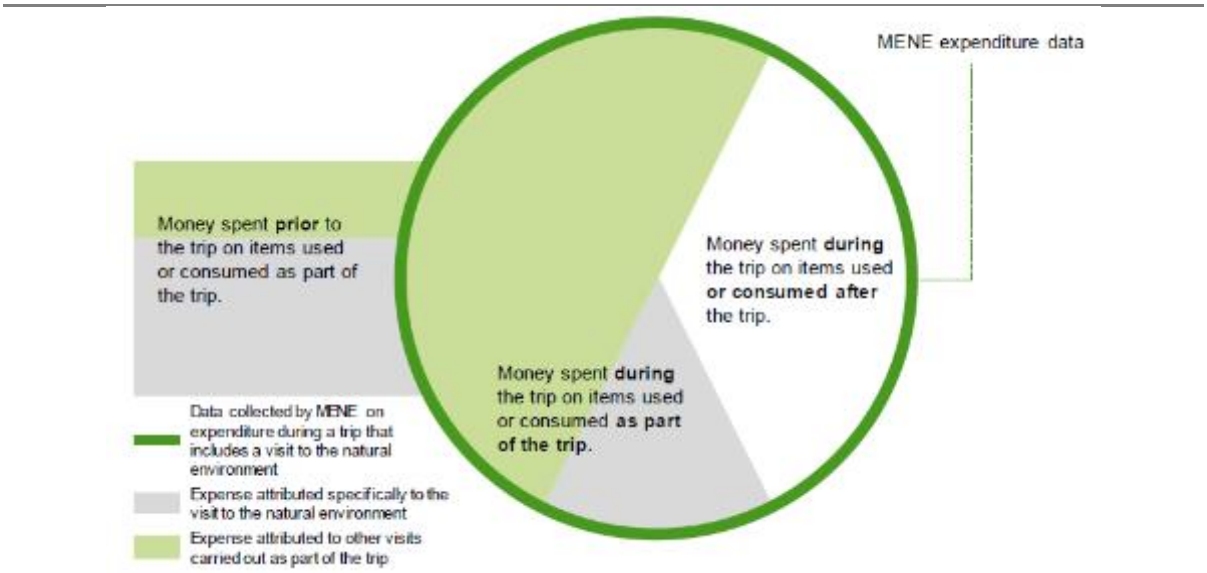


Figure 10-2 Conceptual diagram of how expense attributed to a visit to the natural environment relates to trip