

7066 Central Scotland Forest Trust

Greenspace Evaluation

Summary Report of Research
Findings

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Prepared by

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Background

The Central Scotland Forest Trust (CSFT) is an environmental regeneration charity which is currently working with five Local Authority partners; Scottish Enterprise; Scottish Natural Heritage and others to create the Central Scotland Forest.

The vision for the Central Scotland Forest is that “it will be an attractive place which enhances the lives, and life chances, of those living, working and playing there.” In order to achieve this Central Scotland Forest Trust have developed seven strategic goals, which are being progressed through three activity themes. One of these themes, ‘Social,’ surrounds getting the community to participate in the different activities that greenspaces in the area offer, as well as understanding what the community wants from them.

Whilst there has been increasing recognition of the benefits greenspaces can bring, the views of all its different users are not known. At the moment CSFT do not know to what extent greenspaces are meeting everyone’s needs, for example are there are particular sections of the community that are unable or unwilling to use these spaces? In particular CSFT would like to understand the views of three different user groups: single parents, retired people and horse riders.

Progressive was commissioned to conduct research to explore the extent to which each of these three groups have needs that are already met by greenspaces and to understand how they can be developed to encourage increased usage from each of these groups.

This document summarises the key findings from the research, along with some considerations for the development of greenspaces. Additional reports containing more detailed the findings specific to each of the three user groups consulted during the research (retired people, single parents and horse riders) are also available.

Research Objectives

The overall objective of the study was to provide insight into how each of the three user groups feel about local greenspaces and to develop an understanding of what their 'perfect greenspace' would be. This was broken down into more specific objectives:

- Understanding each user group's feelings towards the local environment and greenspaces
 - Where are their nearest greenspaces?
 - What do they think about their local greenspace(s)?
 - How do the pathways meet the needs of horse riders?
- Understanding the needs of each user group that greenspaces need to meet
 - What does each user group think greenspaces should be used for?
- Exploring the social interactions each user group has with their local greenspace
 - What do they use their local greenspace for?
 - Has their behaviour changed towards their greenspace recently (i.e. use it more / less)?
 - Who do they visit greenspaces with?
 - How often do they visit greenspaces?
 - To what extent are trips to greenspaces planned?
 - Are there any barriers to visiting greenspaces?
 - How do horse riders interact with other users of greenspaces?
- Developing each user group's 'perfect greenspace'
 - What does the ideal greenspace look like?
 - Who is using the greenspace and what are they using it for?
 - Where is this 'perfect greenspace'? – Is it near to the user?
 - How does this 'perfect greenspace' fit into the users current location, what will it bring, how can it be achieved?
 - Who is responsible for developing and maintaining this ideal greenspace?

Methodology

In order to meet the research objectives a qualitative methodology was adopted to engage each of the three user groups and to ensure we fully understood all of the benefits and barriers to using greenspaces.

In total nine focus groups were conducted, consisting of three groups per user type across three different locations. Locations were selected by both Progressive and Central Scotland Forest Trust to provide representation from across the Central Scotland Forest area and also to represent three different Council areas to review if there are any differences amongst local authorities. The locations selected were Falkirk; Shotts in North Lanarkshire and Whitburn in West Lothian.

The sample profile for respondents across each of the three user groups is shown below:

Single Parents

Criteria	Group 1	Group 2	Group 3
Age	20-24 yrs	25-30 yrs	30-35 yrs
Age of children	All had children aged between 1 and 4 years old	A mix of ages with children aged between 1 and 7 years. 1 parent had more than 1 child	A mix of ages with children aged from 1 to 10 years. 2 parents also had more than 1 child
Gender	4 females and 2 males	3 males and 3 females	3 females and 1 male
Location	Shotts	Falkirk	Whitburn
Frequency of using greenspaces with children	Occasional (less than twice a month)	Mixed usage (mix of occasional and frequent users)	Frequent (twice a month or more)
Reason for using public greenspace	Mix of reasons (e.g. educational, enjoyment, alone with others)		

Retired People

Criteria	Group 1	Group 2	Group 3
Age	Over 65 years	Over 60 years	60-69 years
Gender	Mix of male and female	Mix of male and female	Mix of male and female
Location	Shotts	Falkirk	Whitburn
Frequency of using greenspaces	Mixed usage (mix of occasional and frequent users)	Frequent (twice a month or more)	Occasional (less than twice a month)
Reason for using public greenspace	Mix of reasons (e.g. educational, enjoyment, alone with others)		

Horse Riders

Criteria	Group 1	Group 2	Group 3
Age	Mix of ages from 16 yrs		
Gender	Mix of male and female		
Horse ownership	Mix of private owners (either own horse or ride someone else's) and non owners (riding school) – 50/50 split Includes at least 1 riding instructor / riding school employee		
Location	North Lanarkshire	Falkirk	Whitburn
Frequency of using public greenspaces with horse	Ride at least twice a week	Ride at least once a month	Ride weekly/fortnightly

Groups were conducted on the 16th, 23rd and 25th May.

All work has been carried out in accordance with ISO 20252 guidelines, IQCS guidelines and the Market Research Society's Code of Conduct.

It should be noted that, due to the small sample sizes involved and the methods of respondent selection, qualitative research findings do not provide statistically robust data. This type of research does, however, facilitate valid and extremely valuable consumer insight and understanding.

The following sections of the report provide a summary of the main findings from the research. Where relevant, geographical differences have been highlighted along with illustrative examples.

Summary of Main Findings

To explore all of the research objectives respondents were asked to give their views on a variety of themes, including:

- awareness and understanding of greenspaces in general
- motivations and barriers to using any greenspace
- availability of local greenspaces and attitudes towards them
- how greenspaces are used, including the decision making process on where to go and key considerations for each group
- other users of greenspaces and how respondents interact with them

Respondents were also asked to think about their ideal greenspace and describe the key elements of it in detail, from what was in the space through to how it might be maintained.

This section of the report summarises the key themes emerging on these issues. For more detail on the specific considerations and requirements of each user group, please refer to the detailed reports.

N.B. Throughout the single parents groups, there were no issues raised to indicate that there were specific greenspace needs relative to single parents. It has therefore been assumed that the views could be applied to a broader parents and families audience and therefore throughout this report single parents have been referred to as parents.

Understanding and Usage of Greenspaces

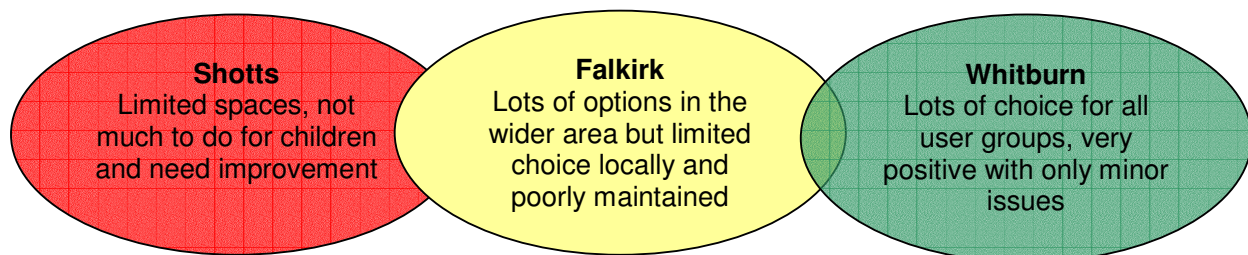
Overall, all user groups had a good understanding of what constitutes a greenspace and the different types of area this could describe. There were however, as would be expected, some differences across the groups in terms of how they used greenspaces.

- Those in the retired groups generally considered a greenspace to be 'somewhere for me' that was quiet, peaceful and surrounded by wildlife. For this group there was not one particular type of greenspace that met these needs; instead there were a variety depending on each individual's preferences.
- Parents viewed greenspaces primarily as places to take their children to play outside and interact with other children. The most important feature for parents was that the greenspace provided activities to keep children occupied.
- For horse riders greenspaces added variety to the horse's exercise regime and allowed them some relaxation outside the riding school and enjoyment of the local surroundings. An important feature for horse riders was that the greenspace provided a safe, off-road environment to ride in. However for practical reasons it was essential that this area was quickly and easily accessible to the stables or fields where the horse was kept.

Evaluation of Local Greenspaces

In all three locations there were a number of local greenspaces within a 5 to 10 minute walk. This presented no problems with accessibility for the retired and parents groups and the spaces available ranged from playing fields and parks, to canals and open spaces. As previously explained, horse riders in all areas tended to use local greenspaces that were within very easy access to the stables or field. Horse riders tended to use large greenspaces such as woodland paths, local fields and local country parks that could be incorporated into a hack lasting 1-2 hours on average. The size of the greenspace required to ride in was therefore another factor limiting the options that were available to horse riders in the local area.

There were some geographical differences in relation to the quality of the spaces across all three locations and user groups:



In Shotts there were very few positive reactions from respondents, with only limited greenspace areas available. The main issue was that greenspace areas were considered to be poorly maintained and contained very little for children to do. Some greenspaces in the area were avoided because they had reached such a state of disrepair that they had become a “dumping ground” for rubbish and were perceived to be unsafe. There was deemed to be only one greenspace suitable for riding in the local area. Although this space had good potential, it was the same space used by most of the local community, therefore was limited in terms of the riding activities that could be done there.

In Falkirk there were a number of different greenspaces in the local area that people could go to, both in the immediate local area and slightly further afield (i.e. 10 minutes by car). These spaces were generally of a good enough quality to meet the retired group needs, however reactions amongst parents were more mixed, with some areas perceived to be very good quality and others not considered to be ‘child friendly’ due to poor maintenance. This resulted in parents either using their local greenspace (e.g. a swing park near home) but considering it adequate at best, or leaving the immediate local area for better quality greenspaces nearby (e.g. Callendar Park, Beecraigs or the Falkirk Wheel). Similarly, horse riders noted that there were a variety of options for riding in the area as a whole, however accessible greenspaces within close proximity to the stables were more limited. In general, poor maintenance and litter were the main issues for most user groups in the Falkirk area. Conflicts with other users were also more prevalent in this area, in particular cyclists, horse riders and young people.

Reactions to local greenspaces were most positive in Whitburn, with all user groups feeling that there was a variety of quality options to choose from. Greenspaces were felt to be well maintained overall and met the needs of all three user groups very well; retired people felt that the spaces provided the feeling of peacefulness and quiet, while parents felt happy to let their children run about in these areas. This was due largely to the regeneration work that has been carried out in the area. Issues with greenspaces in Whitburn related more to poor drainage of specific greenspace areas and other users causing problems, in particular young people. However, these were minor complaints and overall the greenspaces in Whitburn were very satisfactory.

Decision-Making Process

Understanding the decision making process of key user groups in terms of choosing which greenspaces to visit is vital to ensuring that suitable and usable greenspaces are developed in the future. Not surprisingly given their differing uses for a greenspace, retired people, parents and horse riders also tended to have slightly different decision making processes.

For retired respondents the decision making process involved in choosing a greenspace related mainly to whether they had company or not and what they felt like doing that day. Short trips to the local area happened every day, either with other people or on their own, and generally lasted an hour or two. Longer trips tended to be more organised and thought out, either because these were in the company of other people or because they were travelling further afield and activities were planned.

The parents' decision making process was determined by their needs at the time; i.e. whether they wanted a quick trip after school or a weekend day out. There was very little planning involved; instead decisions tended to be made the night before or on the day and were generally made by the child after being given some options by the parent. Short trips were always local and involved activities such as a trip to the swings, a game of football, feeding the ducks, or taking a walk. Longer trips could be either local or further afield and generally lasted at least half a day, if not a full day. These trips could involve either organised activities (e.g. a gala day or visit to a safari park) or taking their own activities (e.g. going for a picnic and taking a bat & ball). The decision to stay local or go further afield was dependent on the cost involved and when the park/area had last been visited (if visited too recently the child would not want to go).

For horse riders accessibility, above all other considerations, underpinned the decision making process. This was in terms of both being able to get to the greenspace easily from the stables and being able to pass safely through it once there. As a result horse riders evaluate the options based on the rider's knowledge that the area can be accessed on horseback. Broadly, the decision of where to go is determined by the activity that the rider wishes to undertake (i.e. a quiet walk, fast cantering, a long hack with walking, trotting and cantering throughout) and the mood of the rider (or the horse!) on that particular day. However, in areas where there are limited greenspaces available to ride in, the activity undertaken is more likely to be determined by the quality of the available space.

In addition to understanding the decision making processes of these users of greenspaces, it is important to understand how these groups interact with each other.

Interacting with Other Greenspace Users

Generally respondents interacted well with other people using their local greenspaces, however there were some groups of users that were identified as occasionally posing problems. In all cases these were small sub-groups of individuals rather than the whole group.

Dog owners were spontaneously mentioned in all groups as being troublesome if they failed to clean up or let their dog run off the lead or out of control near children or horses. This group was encountered frequently in all types of greenspaces and respondents felt quite strongly that additional signage and dog bins should be provided to address this.

Young people were felt to be intimidating when they were hanging around in large groups or loitering in children's play parks. Retired people in particular felt vulnerable around this group and they avoided going into greenspaces in the evening as they felt that they might encounter them. Parents and horse riders were less intimidated by young people, but noted that they often saw the effects of young people misusing local greenspaces (e.g. broken glass bottles), which could raise safety concerns for children or horses using the space afterwards.

Horse riders were not generally perceived to be a problem by most other user groups, primarily due to the fact that they were only occasionally encountered in greenspaces. However, horse riders themselves reported (across all areas, but Falkirk in particular) that they regularly encountered users who challenged their right to access a particular space, or who didn't show consideration (e.g. cyclists squeezing past horses, or dog walkers allowing their dogs to run around the horse's legs). It was felt that these issues were generally a result of a lack of awareness by the general public on anticipating that horses might be in the area, as well as a lack how to behave if they do encounter horse riders in a greenspace. A potential solution put forward was an increased level of signage at or near the entrances to greenspaces that were likely to be shared by a variety of types of users. Such signs would indicate that there were likely to be horses in the area and could potentially provide tips and advice on dealing with them.

Many respondents had encountered quad bikers using local greenspaces in the recent past, usually in areas where these vehicles were forbidden. As a result quad bikers in local greenspaces were generally frowned upon by all user groups, primarily from a safety perspective. It was felt that these users should have a dedicated greenspace away from pedestrians, children and horse riders.

Barriers to Using Greenspaces

There were a number of common barriers to using greenspaces in general, which primarily related to poorly maintained areas and misuse of the space by others. Poor maintenance covered a variety of issues from poor upkeep of the pathways and facilities in the greenspace to problems with litter and dog mess. Misuse of greenspaces included vandalism, young people using the area for drinking or loitering in children's play parks, and quad bikers using greenspaces they are not supposed to. The relative importance and influence of these barriers varied across the three user groups:

- Retired people were more troubled by litter and vandalism, which made the greenspaces feel poorly maintained and encouraged further misuse of the space
- Parents were concerned for the safety of their children, who might hurt themselves on broken glass or a poorly maintained play surface
- Horse riders were influenced by these issues if they had reached the point of rendering the greenspace unusable, e.g. by blocked pathways, broken gates or lots of broken glass

There were also some barriers that were unique to particular user groups:

- Retired respondents felt vulnerable when using greenspaces in the evenings when they felt young people might be hanging around in the area. Females also felt uncomfortable being out on their own in greenspace areas at any time of day and as a result they always went with other people or only went to areas they knew would be populated.
- There were very few greenspace areas parents would never take their children, but for some parents it was a habit to always go to the same few spaces. In this instance there were no real issues with the other greenspaces they didn't visit, they simply didn't fit their needs that day (e.g. no swing park) or were not convenient to get to.
- Barriers preventing the use of greenspace areas amongst horse riders mainly related to accessibility issues and poorly maintained pathways. However, most accessible greenspaces were used by horse riders despite their limitations, due to a lack of choice in terms of places to go. All horse riders encountered a variety of hazards in their local greenspaces. Some hazards, such as the presence of other users in the area, were deemed to be unavoidable and an inevitable element of hacking.

Good maintenance of greenspaces would therefore be the key area for improvement of existing areas to ensure that the areas are used to their full potential. This included:

- Making sure that paths are kept clear of fallen logs, boulders and other debris
- Regular removal of litter and debris
- Maintaining surfaces and pathways
- Providing sufficient dog bins and emptying them regularly
- Monitoring behaviour with park wardens or regular police visits (recognised as being difficult to implement)

All of these elements were included in the ideal greenspace.

Ideal Greenspace

When thinking about their ideal greenspace, one common theme emerged from all three user groups; “a little bit of everything”. This involved creating a utopia within a large area, containing a network of routes, options and activities that could be selected based on mood and the time available to spend in the space. Essentially all three groups identified a set of common ingredients within their ideal greenspace that would provide the variety they sought:

- Woodland / trees
- Paths and mapped routes
- Water
- Open / grassy area
- Nature
- Signage
- Activities / play areas for children (parents and retired only)

Although the core elements of the ideal greenspace were similar for all three user groups, the needs and priorities for each user group varied, as shown in the table below:

User group	Retired	Single Parents	Horse Riders
Primary need to be met by ideal greenspace	Place to go for peace, relaxation and social element (see other users)	Outdoor activity for children	Off-road hacking, safe place to trot, canter and gallop
Essential features	Adequate paths for walking on Signage Seating / resting perches throughout	Activities: swing parks, play areas, nature walks Safe, child-friendly surfaces Facilities: toilets, baby changing, picnic areas Signage	Exclusive areas to canter and gallop – no other users Suitable surfaces (not tarmac or rough stones) No gates Signage

For the retired and parents groups, the ideal greenspace was based on their favourite elements of areas that they already used, i.e. large country parks or favourite walks. Horse riders created an ideal greenspace that most didn't currently have, namely variety and space without worrying about hazards posed by other users.

As expected, quad bikes were excluded from everyone's ideal greenspace, but most other users were permitted on the condition that they behaved responsibly and gave consideration to others sharing the space. It is worth noting that although they were not unwelcome in the greenspace, most respondents would prefer horse riders to be on a separate path from other users. This was reciprocated by horse riders, who indicated that they would feel safer (for themselves as well as for the safety of other users) if they had a dedicated pathway. Therefore, consideration could be given to this issue in the development of greenspaces for the future.

Overall, thoughts on the maintenance of the ideal greenspace were also very similar across the three user groups. There were mixed reactions regarding who should be responsible for maintaining the space. For some it was the responsibility of the local authority, while for others there should also be involvement from other partner organisations, the community or local riding stables. The main concerns over maintaining the space was that the local authority would be unable to prevent vandalism, or would be unable to keep up with the maintenance. If there was a community involvement there were concerns that whilst all

would be willing in theory, a lack of time would prevent most people in the community from actively getting involved. The general consensus therefore was that the local authority or landowner should have primary responsibility for maintenance.

Clearly the challenge facing Central Scotland Forest Trust when considering greenspace development will be in providing that “little bit of everything”. However it may be possible to consider users’ requirements for smaller areas of development.

Considerations for Future Development of Greenspaces

Inevitably in many greenspaces it will be impossible to meet the different needs of all users. It will therefore be important to consider each greenspace area individually in terms of who the core user group or target audience will be and what the space will primarily be used for, so that an optimum strategy can be developed.

For example if a piece of land adjacent to several stables is being redeveloped, it will be more important to consider the needs of horse riders who are likely to be using the space regularly to ensure that the surfaces and materials used are safe. In such an area, providing dedicated pathways for horse riders might be a practical solution and even encourage owners to stable their horses in the local area. By contrast, woodland trails in a small town or village would be likely to be shared by many user groups, therefore developing this type of area might involve ensuring that a suitable pathway is developed for all to use. In this instance catering for horse riders may involve no more than putting up signs alerting other users to expect horses to be in the area.

Toolkit for Considerations when Developing Greenspaces

To assist with all of the different considerations when developing a greenspace, a toolkit has been devised. The principle behind this toolkit is that the greenspace and the needs of the various user groups would be evaluated together, to identify how that space could best meet these needs. It is envisaged that a toolkit would be completed for each greenspace or potential greenspace being developed.

The toolkit takes in to consideration what the greenspace looks like, what it will be used for, the key ingredients to include and the potential issues and solutions. Essentially this involves answering the following key questions:

- Where is the space? What type of space is it?
- What is in catchment area for the greenspace? For example, is it an area with an older population, are there lots of families living in the area, are there horses kept nearby? How many other greenspaces are in the area?
- Who are likely to be the primary users of the space?
- Who are the other users that are likely to use the space? What are their needs?
- What are the potential issues for each user group? Where are the potential clashes?
- What solutions could be offered to meet the needs of the key user groups?

Once completed, each toolkit can be used to develop an investment plan for the greenspace. This investment plan should prioritise the needs of primary users of the greenspace as the first point of investment, with the secondary user groups taking a smaller share of the budget. This in turn would assist in achieving the optimum strategy for developing the space.

An illustrative example of the toolkit is shown overleaf, with the greenspace to be developed based on a community woodland in a small, semi-rural town. As the toolkit illustrates, this greenspace is in a town where the population tends to be slightly older. Therefore the space is likely to be used by a high proportion of retired people; these would be the primary target audience. There are a handful of schools in the area, so the space will also be used by families, but as there is a local swing park this group is likely to be using other local spaces as a priority. The town has only one riding stables, so in this instance, while horse riders will be using the woodland, they will not be the primary target audience. In light of this, the greater proportion of investment can be directed towards meeting the needs of retired people, with some additional attention paid to the needs of single parents and horse riders. By evaluating the greenspace in this way, it can be developed in a way that achieves maximum benefit for the local communities and key user groups.

Greenspace: Community woodland in a small town in a semi-rural location. Local population has a high proportion of retired people. Two local primary schools and one secondary school in the area. Town has a swing park. One riding stables and a couple of fields with horses on the edge of the town.

Potential User Groups	Who are the primary users?	Who else will use the space?	What will the space be used for?	What does it need to include?	What are the potential issues?	What are the potential solutions?	What investment is needed?
Horse Riders		X	Hacking – off-road, near to stables or field	Wide paths Well-maintained paths Even surface Gates need to be user-friendly on horseback	Other users unaware how to react to horses Retired people may take longer to notice horses / move out of the way Poor visibility of potential hazards ahead	Wide pathway for passing other users Signage at / near entrances to expect horses Regular maintenance checks Test gates with local riding schools for usability	Low
Single Parents		X	Nature walks with the children Short trips	Paths and signage	Litter Paths not wide enough Poor maintenance of paths Other users in the same space – cyclists, horse riders	Signage at / near entrances to expect horses Regular maintenance checks Volunteer groups or local community involvement in maintenance	Low
Retired people	X		Leisure walks Short trips Regular visits	Quality paths for walking on Signage Seating	Litter Paths not wide enough Poor maintenance of paths Other users in the same space – cyclists, horse riders, teenagers – or no other users (too quiet)	Signage at / near entrances to expect horses Regular maintenance checks Wide pathway for passing other users Seating at intervals	Medium
Cyclists							
General public							
Young people							

Appendices

Progressive Report Technical Summary

Methodology:

1. The data was collected by focus group discussions
2. The target group for this research study was single parents living in each of the designated areas.
3. In total, 3 group discussions were undertaken. Two groups contained 6 respondents and one group contained 4 respondents.
4. Fieldwork was undertaken between 16th, 23rd and 25th May.
5. Respondents were recruited face to face by Progressive's team of skilled qualitative recruiters. These recruiters worked to predetermined quota controls to ensure that the final sample reflected the requirements of the project. All respondents were screened to ensure that they had not participated in a group discussion or depth interview relating to a similar subject in the last 6 months prior to recruitment.
6. An incentive of £25 was used to compensate respondents for their time and to encourage a positive response.
7. Stimulus materials were used during the group discussions. These included a list of motivations and barriers to using greenspaces used in previous research by Central Scotland Forest Trust, the Greenspace Scotland official definition of what constituted a greenspace and photographs of different things that might constitute a greenspace area.
8. Each recruiter's work is validated as per the requirements of the international standard ISO 20252. Therefore, all respondents were subject to validation, either between recruitment and the date of the group discussion, or on the day of the group discussion. Validation involved respondents completing a short questionnaire asking pertinent profiling questions, and checking that they have not participated in similar research in the past 6 months.
9. It should be noted that, due to the small sample sizes involved and the methods of respondent selection, qualitative research findings do not provide statistically robust data. This type of research does, however, facilitate valid and extremely valuable consumer insight and understanding.
10. All research projects undertaken by Progressive comply fully with the requirements of ISO 20252.