

# Accessing Green Spaces: 'What we heard'

Autumn meetups 2022

In autumn 2022 we held a series of meetups on the topic of accessibility to green spaces. A total of 47 people came to 6 in-person and 2 online events. The people who came were mostly disabled people and people with mental health conditions; at some there were a few professionals. This report is a summary of what we heard.

# Key themes

## Challenges:

Infrastructure  
issues

Lack of  
information

Transport is a  
barrier

Anxiety  
and low  
confidence

## Ideas:

Better and  
accessible  
information

People  
make a big  
difference

Improve  
physical  
spaces

Create  
affordable  
options

# Part 1 – Barriers and challenges

At Barnwood Circle meetups disabled people and people with mental health conditions shared barriers and challenges that they experience when accessing green spaces in Gloucestershire.

Key themes:

Infrastructure  
issues

Lack of  
information

Transport is a  
barrier

Anxiety  
and low  
confidence

## 1. Infrastructure issues

- ✦ Changing Places are few and far between so this limits where people can go.
- ✦ Need to better design picnic areas so they are wheelchair accessible.
- ✦ Gravel pathways are impossible in a manual wheelchair.
- ✦ Paths are often inaccessible.
- ✦ Access gates and turnstiles are a barrier.
- ✦ Flooding in green spaces, makes it hard to access.
- ✦ Not enough benches for resting can be daunting.
- ✦ Lack of shelters from the weather.
- ✦ Not enough nearby accessible parking.
- ✦ Not enough pathways in rural areas – dangers of traffic.
- ✦ Not enough zebra crossings – don't feel safe, traffic too fast.
- ✦ Not enough drop curbs to the road, or opposite each other.
- ✦ Private land, not feeling confident about footpaths to use.
- ✦ Attitude of staff not understanding how to be helpful.

"I think accessible means different things to each person. To me it means that I can get around by myself without having to rely on anyone."

"The limited green spaces that do exist are really hard to get to and they feel rather unsafe. Bikes ride past really fast and you cannot always hear them."

"Getting to green spaces is a big problem. The paths and walkways feel unsafe. They are uneven, have moss and plants growing through the cracks and are unkept. It feels like a hazard. Nothing is maintained."

## 2. Lack of information

- ✦ Not all places that say they have accessible toilets do.
- ✦ Signposts for outdoor spaces are not very accessible for people with impairments (e.g., should be in braille).
- ✦ If a key fob is needed for access – it helps to have information before you come and clear signage onsite.
- ✦ It helps to know if a radar key is needed for getting into an accessible toilet.
- ✦ Poor information about accessibility of green spaces.
- ✦ Lack of information about what is around a green space.
- ✦ Not being aware of what is available in the area.
- ✦ No information about activities for teenagers.
- ✦ Lack of activities for kids during the holidays.
- ✦ People not being aware of the buggies available for hire (i.e., at Robinswood Hill Park).
- ✦ Attitude of staff not understanding how to be helpful.

“There is a key fob you can use to access the gate, but I didn’t know this beforehand. Could have better signposting to let people know about this.”

“People don’t know what is available or where to look for opportunities.”

“Where do I find out about events?”

barn  
wood circle 

### 3. Transport is a barrier

- ✦ Getting to green spaces is difficult without a car.
- ✦ Buses are tricky to get to green spaces.
- ✦ Fewer transport options available in rural areas.
- ✦ Public transport in rural areas are 3 times more expensive and cost of living is higher in rural villages.
- ✦ There isn't enough accessible transport.
- ✦ Pulham's coaches used to put on trips but this has stopped.
- ✦ It is a problem getting to bus collection points.
- ✦ Lack of volunteer drivers to meet demand.
- ✦ Taxis are too expensive.
- ✦ There are lots of minibuses not used by organisations, it's such a waste of resources.
- ✦ Cost of running a minibus is too expensive.
- ✦ Cost of travelling by public transport is a barrier.
- ✦ Poor attitude of transport drivers.
- ✦ Cost of parking on top of entry fees to green spaces is a barrier.

"It goes so fast, and I don't feel safe."

"Except for lifts, I have no other way of getting around".

"We used to provide trips out but finding venues is expensive and non-existent".

#### 4. Anxiety and low confidence

- ◆ Do people feel welcome in those spaces?
- ◆ Lack of motivation to go out.
- ◆ The amount of planning involved is high.
- ◆ Physical disability is a barrier to going out generally.
- ◆ Anxiety when going to new places.
- ◆ Fear of walking in unknown places.
- ◆ Not feeling safe in Gloucester.
- ◆ Not feeling safe on your own when out and about.
- ◆ Unsure about joining an unknown group.
- ◆ Only going to trusted places.
- ◆ Not venturing to new places because the accessibility of them is unknown.

“As a female, I don't feel safe.”

“I find it difficult to access outdoor spaces without a companion.”

“Motivation can be a barrier too; talking yourself out of going somewhere can be really easy and people can be really easily put off.”

“I am less anxious when I am not by myself. Anxiety can be a barrier. That's why I like going to the walking group”.

# Part 2 - Positive experiences

At the meetups people talked about their positive experiences of going outdoors in Gloucestershire.

## 1. Accessible green spaces in Gloucestershire

- ✦ Gloucester Cathedral is a local trusted space for reflection.
- ✦ Robinswood Hill Park has accessible buggies.
- ✦ Gloucester City Farm is welcoming of diverse groups and offers lots of connectivity.
- ✦ Tewkesbury Leisure Centre has a Changing Places toilet.
- ✦ Tewkesbury Nature Reserve is free and accessible.
- ✦ Northleach Farpeak is amazing.
- ✦ Westonbirt Arboretum is a good accessible walk.
- ✦ Batsford Arboretum have a good website.
- ✦ Lydney Harbour has an Information point and audio access.
- ✦ Lydney Park has good accessible paths and gate.
- ✦ The Forestry Commission in the Forest of Dean have improved access gates.
- ✦ Puzzlewood is good place to visit.
- ✦ Forest bathing in the Forest of Dean is good.
- ✦ Using local parks for exhibitions – very inspiring.

“During lockdown I discovered green spaces in a different way and had more opportunity to explore what was on my doorstep.”

“Lydney Park and the lake are lovely, peaceful green space to enjoy. I can access both pathways that links them.”

“Helps anxiety and lifts the soul.”



# Part 3 - Opportunities, ideas and solutions

People offered ideas that could make a difference for disabled people and people with mental health conditions wanting to access green spaces.

Key themes:

Better and  
accessible  
information

People  
make a big  
difference

Improve  
physical  
spaces

Create  
affordable  
options

barn  
wood circle 

## 1. Better and accessible information

- ◆ Clear information on what to expect when you get there.
- ◆ Accessible information before you visit the space.
- ◆ Better access to information on what is available.
- ◆ Better signage; friendly welcoming signage
- ◆ Providing different information in different ways (i.e., pictures of places).
- ◆ Information on how to use green spaces so you feel confident.
- ◆ Could you set up a new card system, where you give an access rating for places and outdoor spaces?
- ◆ Rambling websites could show where they have Trampers.
- ◆ Peer reviews on the website.
- ◆ Drop down menus on websites with filters and colour coded calendar views on opportunities sites.
- ◆ The 'Slow Ways' app is good for walking routes.
- ◆ The 'Access Able' app inspects the accessibility of a place, mostly larger towns.
- ◆ The National Trust magazine is available on CD which is good.

"People with learning difficulties prefer to know beforehand what to expect. For example, knowing the routes on pre-planned walks and knowing if the weather is bad, then the group leader can shorten the walk."

"Having good communication and what can be expected on walks would be helpful for everyone."

"Share knowledge on where to visit. Websites are not often reliable or up to date."

## 2. People make a big difference

- ✦ A buddy system similar to Cotswold Friends.
- ✦ More accessible social groups in green spaces.
- ✦ Having trained volunteers to come with you.
- ✦ Doing things in groups; buddy groups.
- ✦ More volunteers on board to help out with transport.
- ✦ Staff training around disability and mental health conditions to build empathy.
- ✦ Disability training awareness for other people who use outdoor spaces.
- ✦ GP could give prescriptions to go out to green spaces.
- ✦ Emotional support dogs out in green spaces.

“Would be nice and fun to go in a group.”



barn  
wood circle

### 3. Improve physical places

- ✦ No steps.
- ✦ More and better accessible pathways.
- ✦ Better lighting on paths.
- ✦ Having more shelters and rest spaces, to improve people's confidence to use green spaces.
- ✦ More tramps and accessible bikes at green spaces.

### 4. Create affordable options

- ✦ Affordable transport links to green space maybe through shared transport.
- ✦ Free parking and lower entry fees.
- ✦ A chance to try somewhere out first before paying to attend.

"It would be really good to be able to sample events before financially committing to them."

"Involve young people in the design and planning of new benches the installation of them, where they will be etc. Give them ownership and maybe there is less chance young people will vandalise them."

"Seating and rest stops in the right places so people with mobility issues can take regular breaks in nature."

Email [talktous@barnwoodtrust.org](mailto:talktous@barnwoodtrust.org)

Freephone 0800 4220404

What's App 07519 325601

**barn  
wood circle** 