CIVIC UNIVERSITIES AND GREEN SPACES

MAPPING HOW UNIVERSITY-OWNED OUTDOOR SPACES BENEFIT COMMUNITY MENTAL HEALTH AND WELLBEING

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National Civic
Impact Accelerator

CONTENTS

BACK TO CONTENTS

1 Background

The National Civic Impact Accelerator (NCIA) is an ambitious three-year programme to gather evidence and intelligence of what works, share civic innovations, and provide universities across England with the framework and tools to deliver meaningful, measurable civic tstrategies and activities. The programme is funded by Research England, part of UK Research and Innovation (UKRI). It aims to drive collaboration and policy and practice innovation, involving universities, local government, business groups, and the community sector to inform place-based transformations.

The Institute for Community Studies at The Young Foundation is carrying out primary and secondary research activities to generate an evidence base supporting the NCIA programme. This research focuses on the role of universities in delivering impact in their places, considering the perspectives of a range of organisations, actors and communities, to develop a holistic understanding of the impact of university activities and strategies.

The evidence generation process of the Institute is guided by four co-commissioning panels, which represent a range of stakeholder perspectives. The Young Foundation has also been working closely with our NCIA partners to understand the needs of the sector. This mapping research responds to the input of the Health and Wellbeing Panel, made up of representatives from universities across England and third sector organisations with a stake in the issue.

Following on from the Institute's Healthy Universities, People and Places evidence review, the panel prioritised three lines of enquiry around the health and wellbeing impact of universities, which the Institute team developed into research questions. The aim is to ensure the evidence produced is as meaningful and useful to a range of stakeholders as possible, within the natural constraints of the project.

BACK TO CONTENTS

2 Introduction

The evidence is clear: access to university green space has a positive impact on health and wellbeing.[1] University green spaces can support participation in sport and fitness, facilitate social connection, create opportunities for volunteering, and provide a biodiverse environment to spend time in. For students in particular, systematic reviews show that university green spaces increase levels of physical activity and support mental health.[2]

Yet significant inequalities persist in access to green space across the UK's towns and cities.[3] People who live in more deprived areas are less likely to live in neighbourhoods with ready access to green spaces.[4] And this disparity is felt most acutely by people from ethnic minority backgrounds, who are also less likely to live in neighbourhoods with access to green space. This means the public health benefits of green space[5] are unevenly distributed. This is particularly relevant that in the UK as more and more people are living in urban areas. In 2024, 85% of the UK population were living in urban areas.[6]

This puts universities – especially those with a strong civic mission – in an interesting position. To what extent are they able to recognise, protect and invest in their green spaces as civic assets that support mental health and wellbeing, not only of their students and staff, but neighbouring communities too?

This research begins the work of mapping university green space in relation to underlying mental health and wellbeing data, and showcasing some of the good work already taking place in universities across the country. It also explores the potential to scale the methodological approach taken to other universities and places across the UK in future.

The research

This report identifies and maps all university green spaces in four key case study areas – Bristol, Sheffield, Tower Hamlets (East London), and Newcastle.[7]

The university green spaces are then mapped against four key datasets: the Small Area Mental Health Index; active adults (Active Lives Survey); participation in groups, clubs or organisations (Community Life Survey); addresses with private outdoor space. Each of these has been selected to build on the findings from the first evidence review about the mechanisms and outcomes for the relationship between green space and mental health and wellbeing.

1 Layton, J. (2025) Civic Universities and Green Spaces: Exploring the current and potential impact on the wellbeing of local communities, staff, and students. National Civic Impact Accelerator.

2 Ding, et al. (2023) Exploring the association between campus environment of higher education and student health: A systematic review of findings and measures. Urban Forestry and Urban Greening 91: 128168.

3 Mell, I. and Whitten, M. (2022) Green space access is not equal in the UK – and the government isn't doing enough to change that. The Conversation, 25th February.

4 The Health Foundation (2024) Inequalities in access to green space. https://www.health.org.uk/evidence-hub/our-surroundings/green-space/inequalities-in-access-to-green-space

5 Health Foundation (2024) Inequalities in access to green space.

6 World Urbanization Prospects, United Nations (UN), uri: population.un.org/wup, publisher: UN Population Division

7 These institutions are: University of Bristol, University of West of England, University of Sheffield, Sheffield Hallam University, Queen Mary University of London, Newcastle University, and Northumbria University Newcastle.

This approach is designed explore the link between university green spaces and local mental health and wellbeing outcomes explicit. This approach will not identify causal relationships, but it can highlight where areas of mental health need are located, in relation to areas with green space assets.

This work is informed by conversations with key stakeholders from the universities in these locations – including landscape managers, biodiversity and sustainability leads, sports managers, estate teams, professors, and PhD students. These individuals shared what is happening 'on the ground', as well as surfacing areas of challenge and best practice. There are methodological limitations in this approach, in terms of not currently including the perspectives of local communities and place-based partners. However, building on this first phase of primary research may be possible in the future, through wider place-based interviews and engagement with community members and external stakeholders.

Taken together the research has shown:

1. University green spaces need to be made more visible, legible, and accessible to the public
2. Maximising the impact of green space takes a whole-place approach – involving collaboration with local authorities, other anchor institutions, neighbouring communities and the private sector
3. Programmed activity for students, staff, and local communities should be prioritised to welcome and invite greater use of green spaces
4. Investing in the right people with the right skills makes a positive difference in green space provision
5. In a constrained financial environment, health and wellbeing should be a strategic priority for universities' civic mission, and university green spaces should be recognised as a valuable asset to protect and invest in

Why this matters

Universities are increasingly expected to demonstrate their civic value and contribution to place-based challenges. Yet universities are experiencing multiple crises, with their future feeling more uncertain in the wake of artificial intelligence (AI), reduced rates of international students, government funding cuts, declining levels of trust from the general public, and the real-term decline in the value of domestic student fees. All too often this means the civic missions of universities are at risk.[8] In this context, the role of university green space assets offers a compelling opportunity. With a little imagination, university green spaces could be realised as focal points of mental health and wellbeing and community cohesion. There is the scope for every university across the country to take pride in the ways their sites support students, staff, and the public by providing green spaces that enable greater social connection, physical activity, volunteering, and connection with nature. It is hard to think of a quicker way to build a positive relationship with neighbouring communities than welcoming people in, to make the most of these valuable green space assets.

The previous evidence review established that access to green space is not just a 'nice-to-have' but an important dimension of public health. This research investigates how universities can better contribute to ensuring that access is available to the diverse communities neighbouring their green spaces - and what it would take to make that happen.

8 Dobson, J. (2025) Civic capitals at risk: The fragile foundations of the civic university. National Civic Impact Accelerator.

BACK TO CONTENTS

3 Methodology

This research employed a mixed-methods approach across four strategically selected English locations - Bristol, Sheffield, Tower Hamlets, and Newcastle - chosen to provide geographic diversity and include both Russell Group and Post-92 universities engaged with the Civic University Network.

With no central registers of university green spaces available, this work identified 108 green spaces across seven universities. These spaces were then analysed in relation to four key wellbeing metrics - the Small Area Mental Health Index, rates of physical activity, participation in community groups, and access to private outdoor space – within a custom 10-minute walk radius of each university campus.

The mapping was supplemented by online semi-structured stakeholder interviews with university staff including estate managers, sustainability leads, PhD students and academics exploring current practices, challenges, and opportunities for civic approaches to green space management.

Developing this research threw up some interesting challenges that are worth reflecting on.

Selecting case study areas

- A few key factors guided selection:
- achieving a good geographic spread across England.
- including both Russell Group and Post-92 universities, to grapple with the differing levels of resource that these institutions can mobilise.
- Ideally selected institutions would already be engaged with the Civic University Network – both for means of recruiting for interview, but also for being receptive to the programme of work more broadly.

Based on these criteria, a purposeful sample includes Bristol, Tower Hamlets (London), Sheffield, and Newcastle (see table below).

Table 1. Information about case study sample

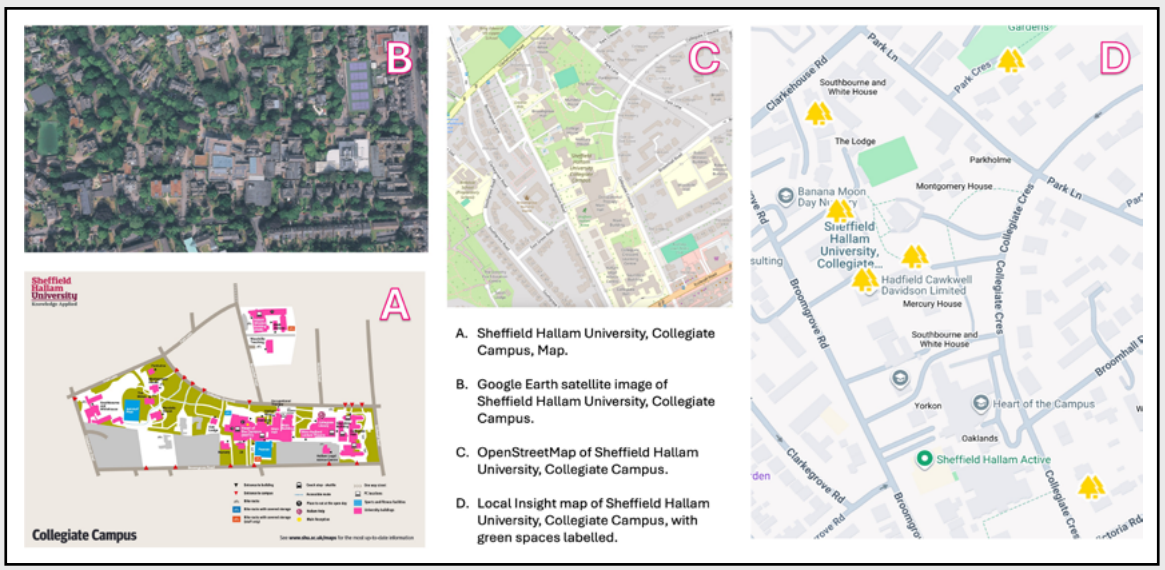
Case study location	University	Classification	Published civic university agreement	Budget
Bristol	University of Bristol	Russell Group	Yes	£1.06bn (2024)
	University of West of England	Post-92	Yes	£379m (2023/24)
Tower Hamlets (London)	Queen Mary University of London	Russell Group	Yes	£712.2m (2023/24)
Sheffield	University of Sheffield	Russell Group	Yes	£887.9m (2023/24)
	Sheffield Hallam University	Post-92	Yes	£311.2m (2021/22)
Newcastle	Newcastle University	Russell Group	Yes	£619.8m (2023/24)
	Northumbria University Newcastle	Post-92	Yes	£338.3m (2022/23)

Mapping university green spaces

Perhaps the most surprising finding at the outset of this research is that there are no central lists of university green spaces at any of the institutions sampled. This meant it was impossible to map the green spaces without first undertaking the work of identifying them.

This was achieved using a combination of campus maps, Google Earth, and OpenStreetMap to identify the green spaces (see figure 1). The campus maps rarely named the green spaces – they were simply a green backdrop to the main university buildings. Satellite imagery helped establish whether the green spaces exist or not, and then OpenStreetMap provided a higher resolution of labelling for each of the locations. This enabled identification of postcode data for each of the green spaces, which could be mapped using the Local Insight GIS tool.

Figure 1. Process of identifying university green spaces



A. Sheffield Hallam University, Collegiate Campus, Map.

B. Google Earth satellite image of Sheffield Hallam University, Collegiate Campus.

C. OpenStreetMap of Sheffield Hallam University, Collegiate Campus.

D. Local Insight map of Sheffield Hallam University, Collegiate Campus, with green spaces labelled.

However, universities often border local authority-managed public parks, meaning that occasionally it is unclear whether a given green space is a 'university green space' or simply a public park. This research therefore focuses on those spaces that it's possible to assume, with a reasonable degree of confidence, are owned and/or maintained by the university.

This list of university green spaces was cross-checked with interviewees to make sure the approach appeared correct.

In total, this process identified 108 green spaces across the four case study locations (across seven universities).

Selecting metrics

The next step was to select the metrics for exploring mental health and wellbeing.[9] Building on the research from the rapid evidence review identified:

9 For this research we had access to Local Insight, a user-friendly GIS tool, powered by Oxford Consultants for Social Inclusion (OCSI) which facilitates access to 1500+ datasets.

- **Small Area Mental Health Index** A composite measure available at Lower-layer Super Output Area (LSOA) produced by the Place-Based Longitudinal Data Resource. It combines data on NHS-Mental health related hospital attendances; prescribing data; QOF – depression; DWP – claimants of Disability Living Allowance (DLA); and Personal Independence Payment (PIP) for mental health reasons and learning difficulties. The indexed score highlights areas with higher levels of mental health need.

- **Active adults (age 16+)** Produced by Sport England as part of their Active Live Survey. The metric shows the proportion of active adults (age 16+), where people are described as active if they have done at least 150 minutes of physical activity in the past week. Activities can include walking, cycling, dance, fitness and sporting activities, but exclude gardening which is outside of Sport England's remit.

- **Participation in groups, clubs or organisations** Produced by the Department for Culture Media and Sport for The Community Life Survey. This indicator reflects the percentage of respondents who have taken part in a group, club or organisation in the last 12 months.

- **Addresses with private outdtoor space** Based on analysis of Ordnance Survey (OS) data. This shows the proportion of addresses with access to private outdoor space (for both houses and flats).

Each of these metrics relates to an aspect of the rapid evidence review previously produced in this programme.[10] As well as exploring mental health need (Small Area Mental Health Index), and green space need (access to private outdoor space), this research sought to explore the mechanisms that mean green space contribute to mental health and wellbeing. This is why the metrics on rates of physical activity and participation in communal life are included.

Choosing appropriate geographies

Once the green spaces were identified and appropriate metrics selected, the next step was to choose appropriate geographic scales to enable analysis. In other words, where did this research hope to identify a meaningful relationship between the green space and the data.

Local authority data was readily available but is a large category for looking at the relationship of individual green spaces with underlying mental health and wellbeing metrics.

It would have been helpful to be able to map the data at the neighbourhood scale – but neighbourhoods are notoriously tricky to define geographically. As the work of Citizen Network and Data for Action have identified, mapping the neighbourhoods of a city such as Sheffield can be complex.[11]

10 Layton, J. (2025) Civic Universities and Green Spaces: Exploring the current and potential impact on the wellbeing of local communities, staff, and students. National Civic Impact Accelerator.

11 Duffy, S. and French, T. (2024) Defining Our Neighbourhoods: Identifying our neighbourhoods is important because it helps citizens to share the work of taking care. Citizen Network, https://citizen-network.org/library/defining-our-neighbourhoods.html

It would also have been ideal to have been able to map the data to communities of users of the green spaces to identify impact. This wasn't possible within the remit of this research project but emerged as a priority as a next stage of evidence and insight gathering.

The geographic scale of comparison was a 10-minute walk radius from the centre of each universities' campus[12] – this was partly enabled by the fact that many of the university green spaces were concentrated on a campus. This is a small enough geographic scale to reasonably describe the 'neighbourhood' that each university campus is located in. It also aligns with the precedent set by the Mayor of London with the creation of their '10-Minute Walk Map' to improve London's network of green corridors and open spaces.

This process created 15 custom geographies centred around the university campuses in each case study location, enable this research to describe the mental health and wellbeing metrics outlined above for the immediate surrounding area of a university campus.

Interviews

To supplement the data analysis, key stakeholder interviews were conducted with individuals at each of the universities in the case study locations.

These stakeholders were recruited purposefully relating to job title or area of research expertise. Community members were not interviewed, as this was beyond the scope of this research. This research is targeted primarily at universities and estate managers, and therefore it was important to gain their perspectives.

The interview conversations were designed to check whether the research had identified the right green spaces, and surface areas of challenge and best practice. The mapping work was presented to the stakeholders as part of the interview conversations.

Table 2. Number of interviews

Case study location	University	Number of interviews
Bristol	University of Bristol	1
	University of West of England	1
Tower Hamlets (London)	Queen Mary University of London	5 (group interview)
Sheffield	University of Sheffield	3
	Sheffield Hallam University	1
Newcastle	Newcastle University	2
	Northumbria University Newcastle	2

12 This was done using the TravelTime Isochrone API Playground (https://playground.traveltime.com/isochrones), and geojson.io (https://geojson.io/) to generate the GeoJSON files to be uploaded to Local Insight.

BACK TO CONTENTS

4 Spotlight areas

BRISTOL

Bristol is a vibrant city home to two major universities – University of Bristol, founded in 1876; and the University of the West of England (UWE), founded in 1992. The two universities, alongside City of Bristol College, Bristol City Council, and the City Office, have created a Civic University Agreement together.[13]

University of Bristol has two main campus locations – Clifton Campus in the city centre, and Langford Campus located in a rural village 14 miles south of the city. UWE also has two campus locations – Frenchay Campus, a 15-minute bus ride from the city centre, and Glenside Campus, a 30-minute bus ride from the city centre.

Recent evidence shows that 7% of Bristol residents reported a low life satisfaction score in 2022/23 (higher than the national average, 5.6%), and 20% of Bristol residents have 'poor mental wellbeing' rising to 24.4% in the most deprived areas.[14]

Against this backdrop, Bristol's university green spaces represent a great potential asset for supporting communal mental health and wellbeing. This project's mapping work identified 31 green spaces across University of Bristol and UWE – including botanical gardens, lawns, sports fields, gardens, allotments, and wildflower meadows. TWhese spaces were primarily located in four campus locations.

Table 3. Bristol's university green spaces

University	Campus	Number of green spaces identified
University of Bristol	Clifton	6
	Langford	6
	Other	3
University of West of England	Frenchay	12
	Glenside	4

Mapping the data

Over the next two pages are maps of Bristol's university green spaces, including an outline of the campuses' immediate neighbourhood (ie, a 10-minute walk radius from campus). This helps explain how the campus neighbourhoods compare to the city as a whole and identify where the universities green space assets are located in relation to the rest of the city.

13 Working Together for Bristol: Our Civic University Agreement, 2023-2030.

14 Joint Strategic Needs Assessment (JSNA) Health and Wellbeing Profile 2024/25. NHS Bristol, North Somerset and South Gloucestershire.

Figure 2. Bristol, Small Area Mental Health Index, LSOA

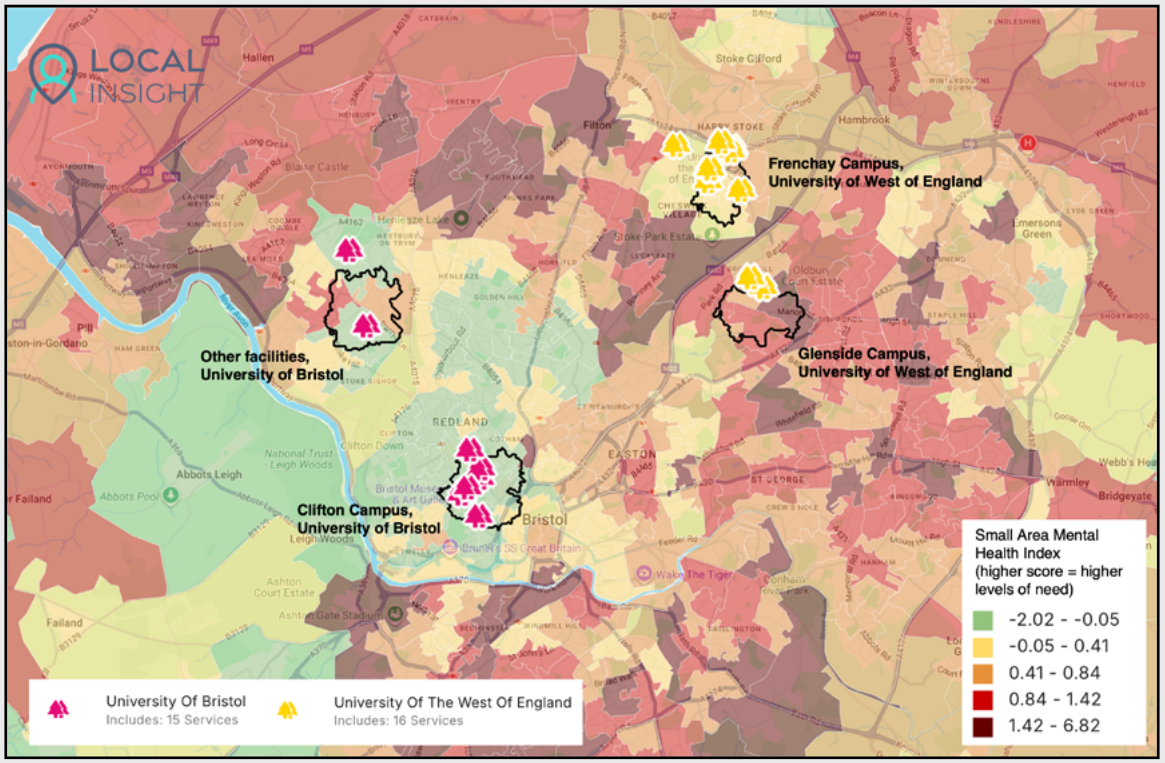


Figure 3. Bristol, Active adults, LSOA

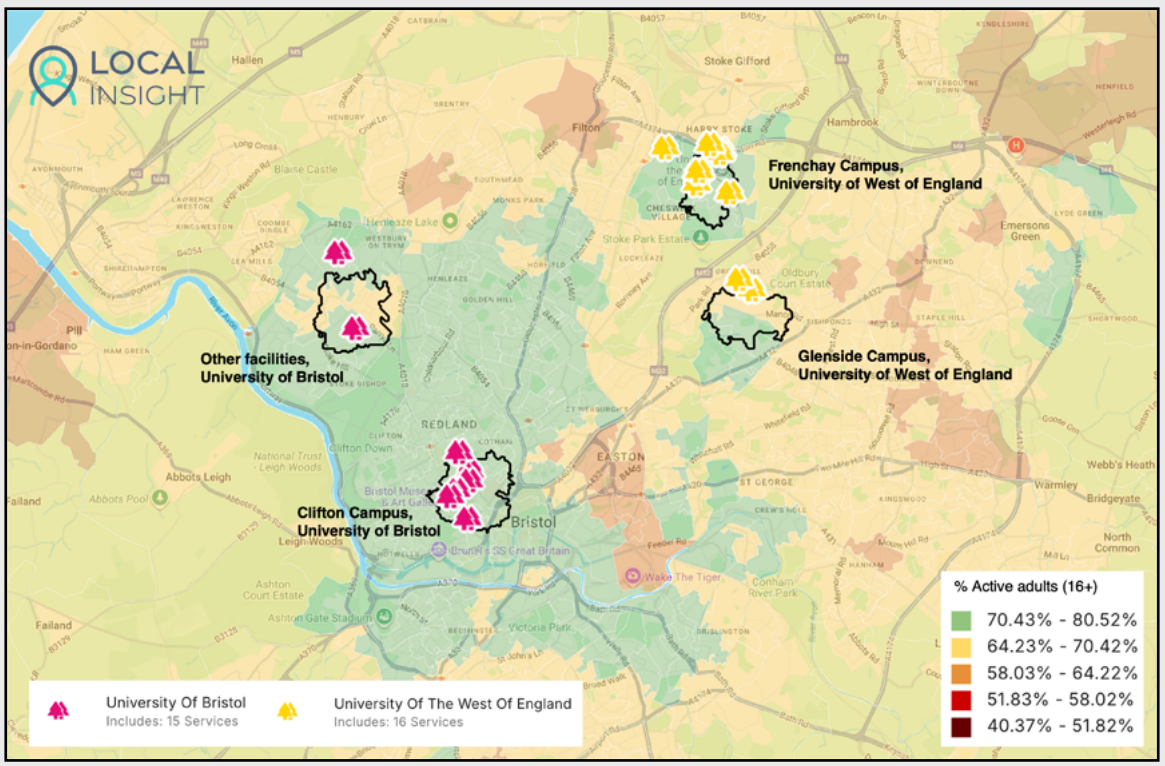


Figure 4. Bristol, Taken part in groups clubs or organisations, LSOA

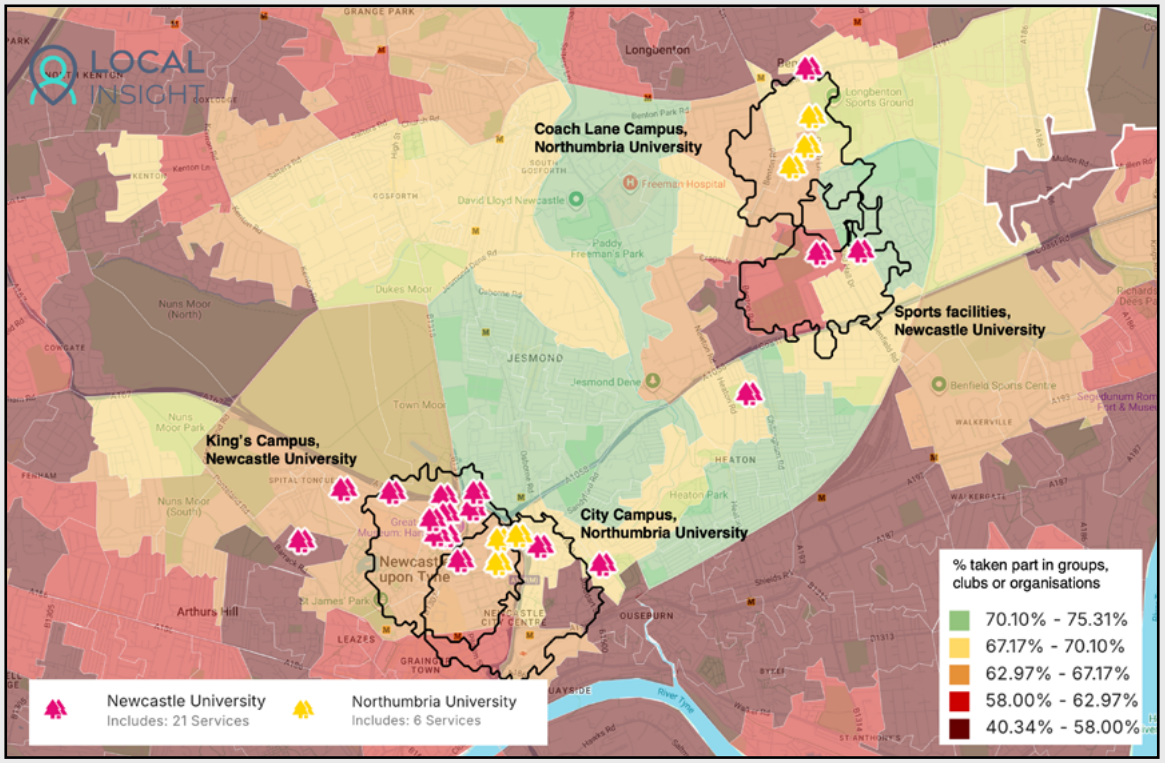


Figure 5. Bristol, Addresses with private outdoor space, LSOA

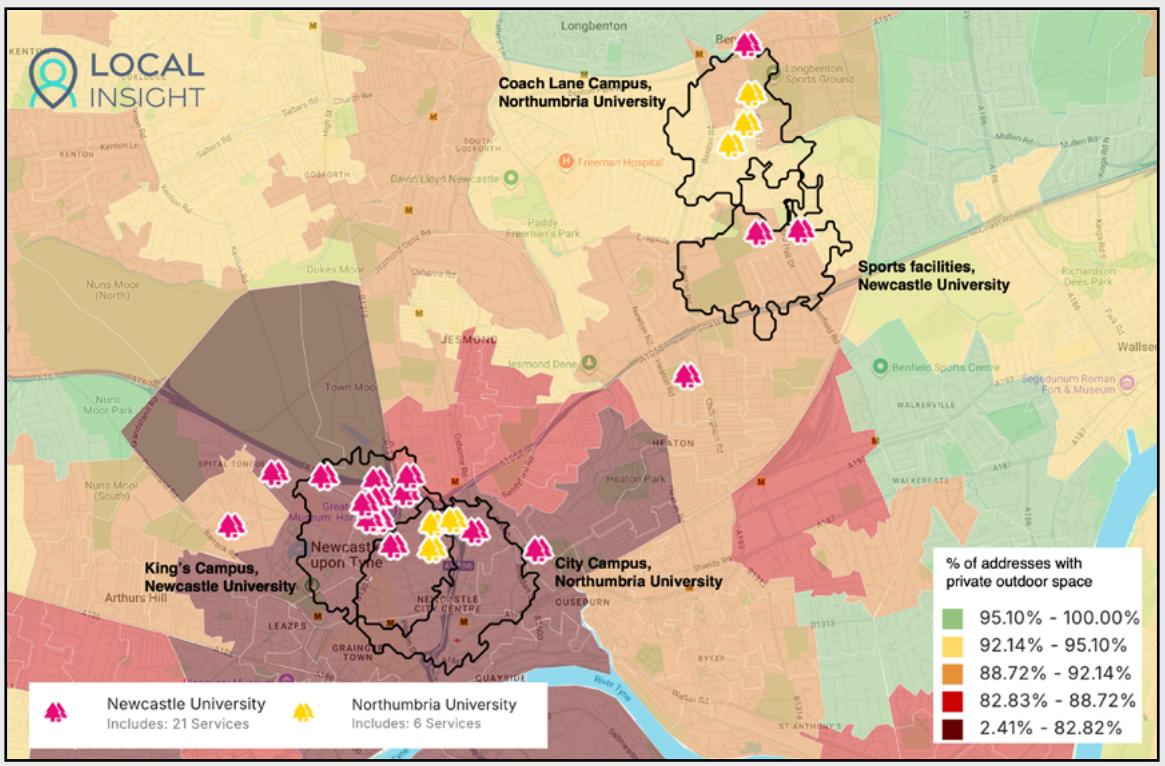


Table 4. Bristol, key mental health and wellbeing data

Area		Small Area Mental Health Index	Active adults (age 16+)	Taken part in groups, clubs or organisations	Addresses with private outdoor space
	England	0.67	62%	64%	88%
	Bristol	0.88	70%	62%	84%
University of Bristol	**Clifton**	-0.26	78%	68%	45%
	Langford	0.39	67%	71%	87%
	Other	0.18	75%	71%	88%
University of West of England	**Frenchay**	-0.01	77%	70%	84%
	Glenside	1.19	70%	60%	86%

Data highlighted green better than local authority average.
Data highlighted pink worse than local authority average.

The data from Bristol illustrates that the campus neighbourhoods are generally areas that have less mental health need, more active adults, higher rates of group participation, and more private outdoor space than the average for Bristol as a whole.

Of the campuses mapped UWE's Glenside campus is located in the area with the most need. For the University of Bristol, there are areas of need located to the east and to the south of their main Clifton campus, and towards the coast to the north-west of their satellite facilities.

As figure 5 highlights, central Bristol is an area where access to private outdoor space is less common. Central urban areas are also going to be locations where the creation of green space is challenging due to competing land values and use. This makes the existing green space assets – including university green spaces – especially important.

Identifying best practice and challenges

Our mapping work highlights the challenge for universities in dense urban environments, where central populations have limited access to private outdoor space. In this context, universities need to actively manage their green spaces to 'work harder' and focus on being multifunctional rather than single purpose. The case identified at UWE's Frenchay campus illustrates the potential of how valuable central university green space can be designed to achieve this in practice and deliver multiple benefits to students, staff, the local community and nature.

Using campus green space for social prescribing

In Bristol, one of the initiatives shared was BEELINE - a connected network of small-scale bioscapes across the UWE campus, focused on growing fruit and food, providing rest for students and staff, increasing biodiversity and attracting pollinators.

The initiative developed in tandem with a wider interest in social prescribing on campus. For example, the MOVE initiative that organises free activities for students (and provides them at discounted rates for staff and local communities) around campus. Some 130 sessions are organised per week including forest bathing, open water swimming, yoga in the wellbeing

garden, and trail walking. The horticulture offer evolved into a catering offer that encouraged students to sow, grow, harvest, and eat their own produce.

The BEELINE builds on this to create a network of green spaces around campus that are good for both humans and pollinators. Each 'parklet' has pollinator-friendly planting (including herbs, fruits or vegetables) and a place to rest. This encourages students to either actively engage with the space or sit and enjoy the aesthetics.

With this solid foundation, the grounds team have worked collaboratively across the university to engage as many different students as possible. They have worked with creative writing students to develop advertisement copy for the initiative, business studies students to develop cases for support, and architecture students to use natural materials in their models. This approach creates resource and insight for the grounds team to incorporate into their work, provides valuable experiences for the students on their courses, and hopefully improves their health and wellbeing too.

The BEELINE is testament to what can be achieved on a relatively small scale with a modest budget. To continue this work, the team are currently developing impact metrics that speak to university management ie, demonstrating student performance, student satisfaction, place attachment and graduate retention. They incorporate that into risk assessments for all their green spaces in an effort to document the breadth of value university green spaces can provide.

Lack of visibility

Despite the wonderful innovative work of the BEELINE, the initiative was not uncovered during desk-based mapping. It was only when it was shared directly that it became visible. In part, this is the challenge of identifying parklets using the methods available. However, it is also about how opaque university green spaces are not only to the general public, but to students too.

Grounds teams shared the challenges they faced in introducing new maps. Universities were hesitant about creating new logos, maps, websites, or social media outputs. Grounds teams had to have a high level of patience to navigate the institutional caution.

This challenge is often amplified by static budgets, where university grounds teams may not have the resources to undertake additional projects, let alone publicise and communicate them. Although there may be a desire to experiment with innovative geocaching activities, selfie campaigns, gamification, or dedicated landing pages for green activities – these activities are often not valued and so are not sustained or centrally embedded. Grounds teams have a core duty to keep spaces secure, looked after and tidy. High-quality green spaces that support mental health and wellbeing and proactively engage students are still often seen as a 'nice-to-have'.

In practice, this means that even engaged researchers pro-actively looking for green space initiatives supporting mental health and wellbeing, might not be able to find cases like the BEELINE. It is difficult to imagine how neighbouring communities would ever hear about these initiatives or feel comfortable and welcome to enjoy the environment themselves.

Key findings

- **The importance of investing in university estates teams** with a range of skills, to support more holistic approaches to university green spaces: UWE demonstrated how impactful this could be for both people and the planet, in terms of spaces that were designed for climate adaptation and increased biodiversity, alongside inclusive management practices that made visible, and accessible, the mental health benefits of daily contact with university green spaces for a greater diversity of students, staff and local people.

- **The need to more accurately map and evidence existing university green spaces**, before they are put at risk: Especially in heavily built-up urban areas, such as the centre of Bristol, where land value is at a premium. By documenting these sites and creating formal assessments about their current use and social, ecological and economic value, universities can make more informed decisions about what might be lost should these key assets be placed under threat of development.

TOWER HAMLETS

Tower Hamlets is one of London's most diverse and densely populated boroughs, and home to Queen Mary University of London (QMUL), founded in 1887. Queen Mary was a founding partner of the Civic University Network and launched their Civic University Agreement in 2022.

Queen Mary's has two main campuses in Tower Hamlets: its main Mile End campus, and the Whitechapel campus – a 20-minute walk away and home to its medical and dental schools.

Tower Hamlets faces substantial mental health and wellbeing challenges and has some of the highest levels of deprivation in England. There are approximately 5,000 adults living with severe mental illnesses in the borough, a greater prevalence than both London and England.[15]

The borough is also home to two of London's largest parks – Victoria Park (to the north of Queen Mary), and Mile End Park (which runs to the east of Queen Mary on the other side of the Regent's Canal).

This mapping work identified 19 university green spaces. As Tower Hamlets is home to over 120 parks and green spaces,[16] there is an interesting question for Queen Mary about how to best fit into this existing network and potentially offer something distinct for its neighbouring communities.

Table 5. Tower Hamlets' university green spaces

University	Campus	Number of green spaces identified
Queen Mary University of London	Mile End	15
	Whitechapel	4

15 Joint Strategic Needs Assessment 2025: Tower Hamlets Public Health. Tower Hamlets.

16 https://www.towerhamlets.gov.uk/lgnl/leisure_and_culture/parks_and_open_spaces/parks_and_open_spaces.aspx

Mapping the data

Over the next two pages are maps of Tower Hamlets' university green spaces, including an outline of the campuses' immediate neighbourhood (ie, a 10-minute walk radius from campus). This helps understand how the campus neighbourhoods compare to Tower Hamlets as a whole and see where the universities green space assets are located in relation to the rest of the local authority.

Figure 6. Tower Hamlets, Small Area Mental Health Index, LSOA

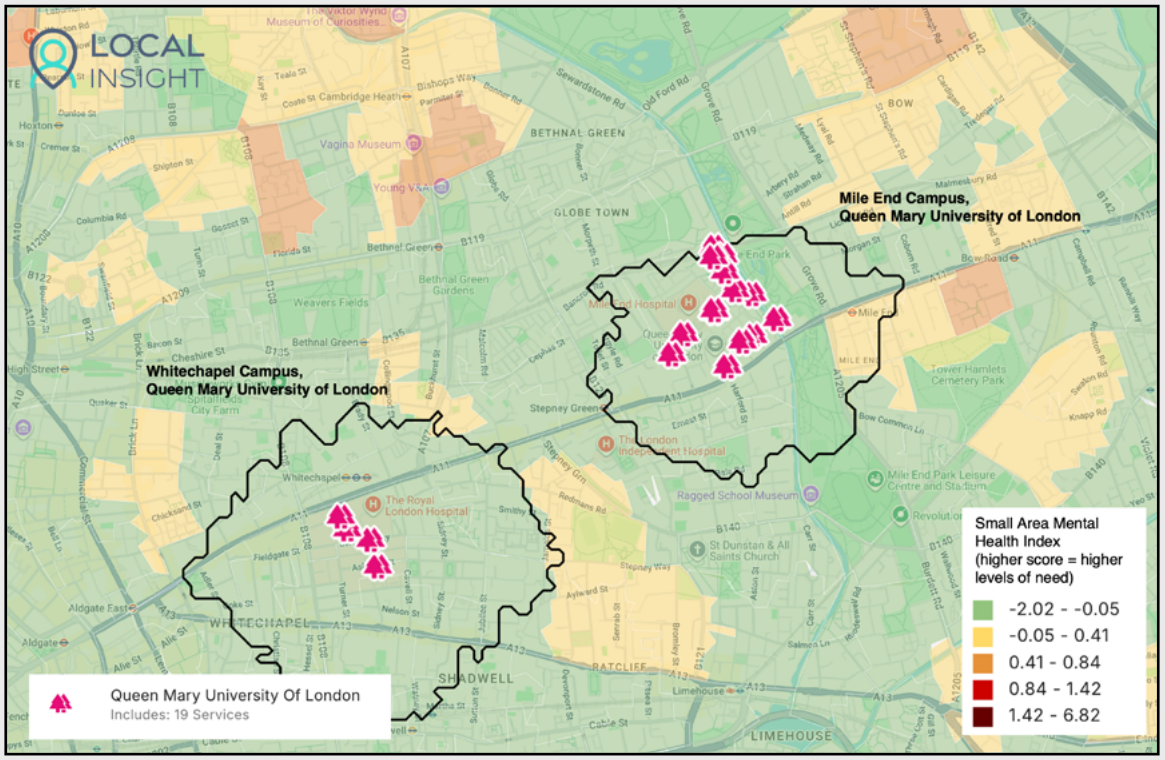


Figure 7. Tower Hamlets, Active adults, LSOA

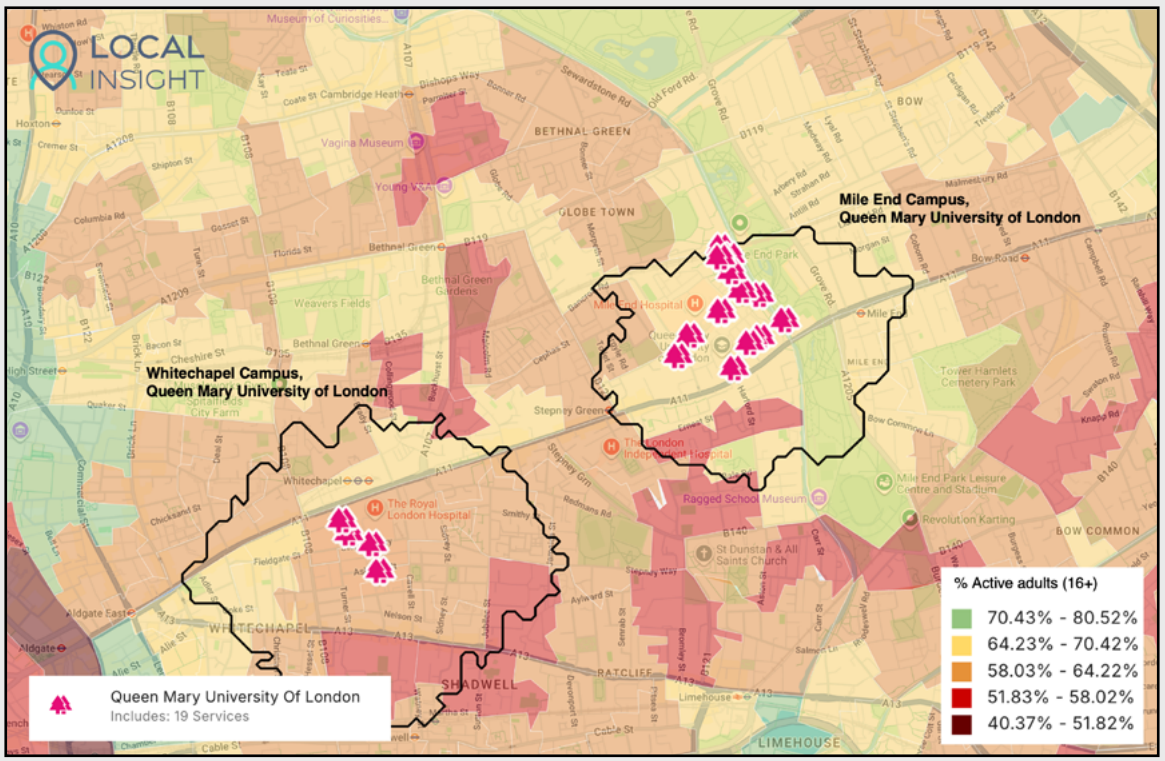


Figure 8. Tower Hamlets, Taken part in groups clubs or organisations, LSOA

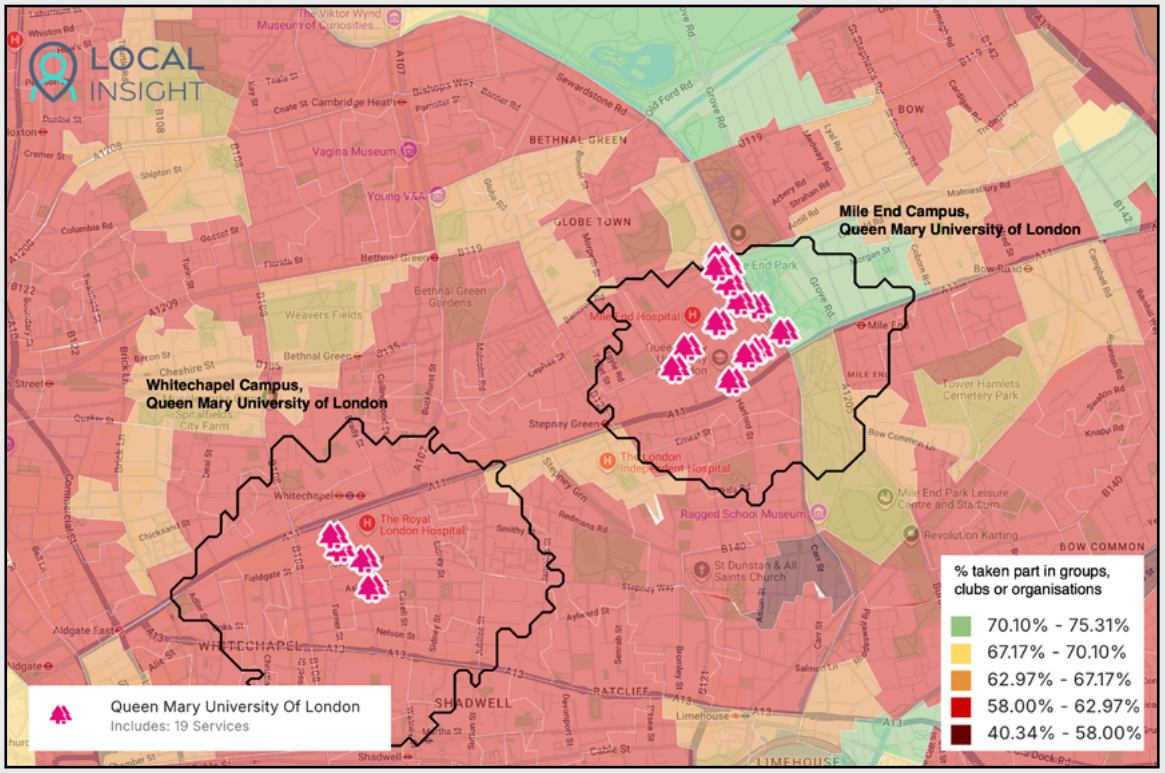


Figure 9. Tower Hamlets, Addresses with private outdoor space, LSOA

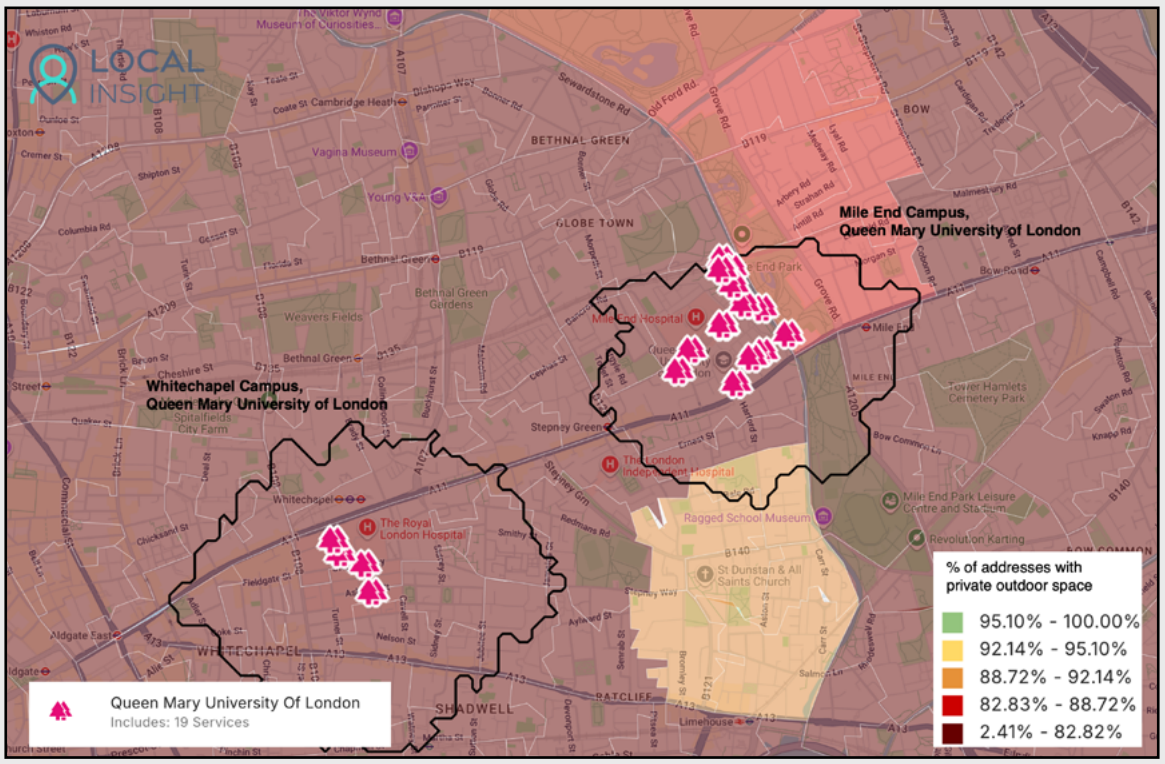


Table 6. Tower Hamlets, key mental health and wellbeing data

Area		Small Area Mental Health Index	Active adults (age 16+)	Taken part in groups, clubs or organisations	Addresses with private outdoor space
	England	0.67	62%	64%	88%
	Tower Hamlets	-0.41	63%	62%	60%
Queen Mary University of London	Mile End	-0.4	64%	61%	69%
	Whitechapel	-0.6	61%	60%	55%

Data highlighted green better than local authority average.
Data highlighted pink worse than local authority average.

The data from Tower Hamlets illustrates that Queen Mary campuses are located in areas with slightly different characteristics. The immediate neighbourhood of the Mile End campus has slightly less mental health need than Tower Hamlets as a whole, more active adults, and more addresses with access to private outdoor space. The immediate neighbourhood of the Whitechapel campus has a lower rate of active adults, lower rate of participation in groups, clubs or organisations, and lower rates of access to private outdoor space compared to Tower Hamlets as a whole.

As figure 6 highlights, there are areas just beyond the 10-minute walk radius for both Whitechapel and Mile End Campus, that have greater mental health need than the immediate campus neighbourhoods.

In comparison to the other locations mapped (see sections on Bristol, Newcastle and Sheffield), Queen Mary's campuses are located near one another (ie, the scale of the mapping is higher). This suggests that Queen Mary's approach to managing its green spaces could have a meaningful impact the people living in and travelling through this corner of Tower Hamlets.

Identifying best practice and challenges

Given that Queen Mary is located in an area with excellent green spaces already (Victoria Park and Mile End), it might feel redundant for the university to actively consider the contribution its green spaces can make. However, the case this research identified highlights how universities that neighbour areas with high levels of mental health need (such as is present across Tower Hamlets) can create equitable and impactful partnerships with local groups, communities, and anchor institutions. Moreover, although many public parks are fantastic civic assets, they are not necessarily managed with a civic purpose in mind. A university with a strong civic agenda has opportunity to demonstrate and instil best practice that others can build upon.

Collaborative partners for green change

A small team from the School of Geography at Queen Mary and the Place Directorate at the London Borough of Tower Hamlets were awarded a 'Large Grant' from Queen Mary's Centre for Public Engagement in 2023-24. The project was titled 'Designing Tower Hamlets' Green Grid: How gender inclusive design can reshape urban green spaces'. The project aimed to develop insight into how Tower Hamlets' Green Grid Strategy could better support the needs of the borough's young women.[17]

The research – which incorporates peer research methods – resonates with many of the key ideas highlighted in this report.[18] It highlights the importance of green spaces as social infrastructure – as places that facilitate social connection –supporting sport, play, gardening, growing, and events. It discusses the need for green spaces and routes to be clear and legible, recognising that signage, branding, and maps can help a network of green spaces become more coherent. It also foregrounds the need for high-quality green spaces, spaces with distinct facilities, well-maintained basic infrastructure (lighting, toilets, etc.), places to sit and dwell, and spaces that invite and create opportunities for play and sport.

This work highlights the potential for universities to be key partners in supporting better green environments their places. Although the guidance report wasn't concerned with Queen Mary's green spaces in particular, it was drawing on the university in other ways - from the grant funding that helped enable the project, through to the theoretical, research, and methodological expertise of the Queen Mary team who took part in the project.

Alison Blunt, Deputy Vice Principal for Impact at Queen Mary, who was involved with the project continues to advocate for the role of green spaces in supporting health and community.[19]

Hopefully the project will create the foundations for Tower Hamlets to develop more inclusive green spaces that will ultimately improve the built environment for all people in the area.

This example highlights how universities can be partners for green change in place. The positive working relationship between the team at the London Borough of Tower Hamlets and Queen Mary is an example of how collaboration can happen, and how universities can realise their potential as civic anchors that have a responsibility to deliver research and engagement that has tangible local impact.

It has also created a set of tools that could not only inform how the London Borough of Tower Hamlets manages its green spaces in an inclusive and accessible way but have also generated a range of ideas for how Queen Mary might manage its own green spaces.

17 Luke and McCulloch (2017) *Tower Hamlets Green Grid Strategy: Update 2017*. Land Use Consultants.

18 Savage, J. (2025) *This is for the majority – from theory to practice: Guidance for implementing gender inclusive design in Tower Hamlets.* Tower Hamlets.

19 https://www.futureoflondon.org.uk/news/how-gender-inclusive-design-can-work-for-everyone/

The challenges of a central urban location

Queen Mary's campus is located in a densely populated area of East London. This presents some interesting challenges.

The eastern edge of the Mile End campus is bordered by the Regents' Canal. This has a public footpath that skirts the campus and creates a barrier to Mile End Park. When thinking about how the university's green spaces connects with the wider network of urban green spaces in Tower Hamlets, this can be a challenge, as students heading to Mile End Park have to go via the busy Mile End Road, and the public would be dissuaded from heading the other way.[20] To the north of the Mile End campus is a raised rail line that acts as barrier between the campus and Meath Gardens – a park on the other side.[21]

The presence of these hard transport infrastructures highlights how important it is to be deliberate about recognising university green spaces as an important asset whose impact can be increased by improving connections with the wider network of green spaces in place. In many ways, green infrastructures are 'playing catch-up' with transport, power, and telecommunications infrastructure; green infrastructures are all too easily disrupted, broken up, and disconnected.

In this context, the university could see its role as consolidating green corridors and advocating improved connectivity between its green spaces and neighbouring parks (even if that means negotiations with Transport For London, National Rail, the NHS, and the Canal and River Trust – to name a few key local stakeholders). This would create a shared benefit for students (with improved access to celebrated green spaces), and for the public (with improved access to the university's green spaces).

Key findings

- Universities can be strategic partners for green change beyond their own estates: Queen Mary's collaboration with Tower Hamlets council on the Green Grid Strategy demonstrates how universities can leverage their research expertise and funding capacity to improve broader green infrastructure, even when they're not the primary green space providers in an area.

- Areas of highest mental health need often lie just beyond the university's reach: The mapping shows that areas with greater mental health challenges are located outside the 10-minute walk radius from both campuses, suggesting Queen Mary's direct impact through green space access may be limited, but their role as civic partners becomes more strategically important for reaching these communities.

20 Howarth Tompkins (2021) Queen Mary University of London Mile End Campus: Supplementary Planning Document May 2021. Tower Hamlets.

21 Howarth Tompkins (2021) Queen Mary University of London Mile End Campus: Supplementary Planning Document May 2021. Tower Hamlets.

SHEFFIELD

Sheffield is a post-industrial city in Yorkshire, home to two major universities – the University of Sheffield founded in 1905, and Sheffield Hallam University (SHU) founded in 1992. Both universities have separate, but aligned, Civic University Agreements.[22, 23]

University of Sheffield has two primary campus areas – it's city centre campus in the heart of Sheffield, and it's Endcliffe and Ranmoor student accommodation area a 15-minute bus ride West of the main campus. SHU also has two main sites, its city centre campus located right by Sheffield's train station, and its collegiate campus, a 15-minute bus ride southwest of the main site.

As a whole, Sheffield as a city has comparable metrics to England as a whole in relation to mental health and wellbeing outcomes – with 21% of adults experiencing high anxiety (vs 23% for England), and an incidence rate of 1.4% people diagnosed with depression per year (vs 1.5% for England as a whole).[24] However, Sheffield has high levels of inequality with areas in the South-west of the city being in the 20% least deprived areas of the UK, and those in the North-east in the top 20% most deprived.

Our mapping work identified 31 green spaces across the University of Sheffield and Sheffield Hallam University – including formal lawns, sports facilities, and pocket parks. Sheffield is a notoriously green city – with 61% of the city identified as green space.[25] This creates an interesting question for the universities in thinking about how they connect with this wider urban ecosystem, and what distinct offer they could make to their neighbouring communities.

Table 7. Sheffield's university green spaces

University	Campus	Number of green spaces identified
University of Sheffield	City Centre	12
	Endcliffe and Ranmoor	5
	Other	2
Sheffield Hallam University	City	6
	Collegiate	6

Mapping the data

Over the next two pages are maps of Sheffield's university green spaces, including an outline of the campuses' immediate neighbourhood (ie, a 10-minute walk radius from campus). This can help identify how the campus neighbourhoods compare to the city as a whole, and to see where the universities' green space assets are located in relation to the rest of the city.

22 Sheffield Hallam University. At the Heart of the Region: Our Commitments to our Communities.

23 The University of Sheffield. Real world partnerships: Working with partners to shape the region.

24 Office for Health Improvement and Disparities. Public Health Profiles 2025. Crown copyright.

25 https://www.welcometosheffield.co.uk/content/articles/a-greenground-map-of-sheffield/

Figure 10. Sheffield, Small Area Mental Health Index, LSOA

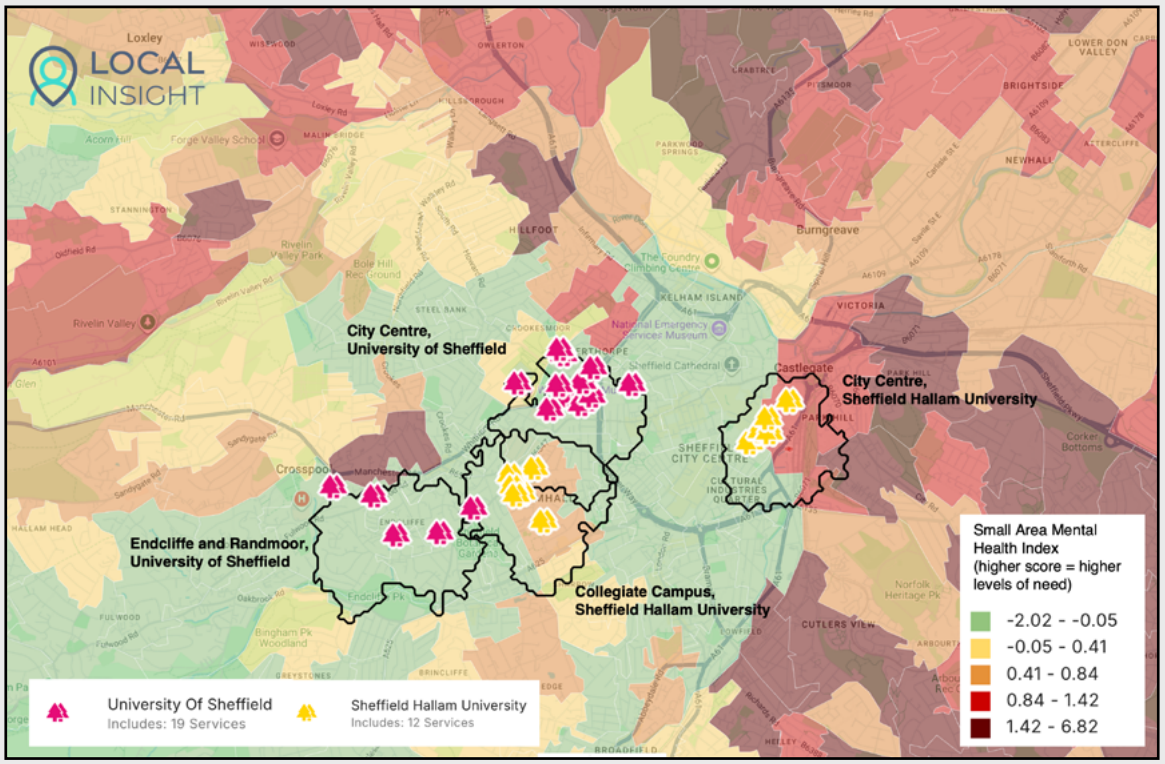


Figure 11. Sheffield, Active adults, LSOA

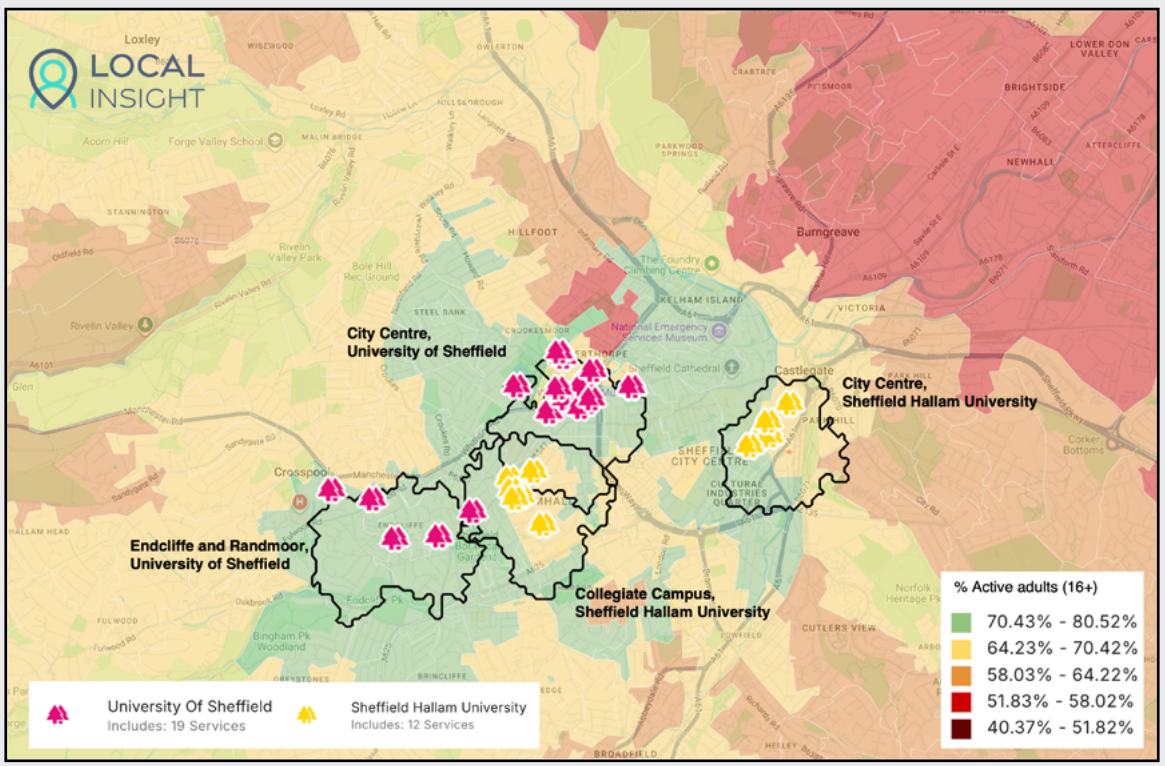


Figure 12. Sheffield, Taken part in groups clubs or organisations, LSOA

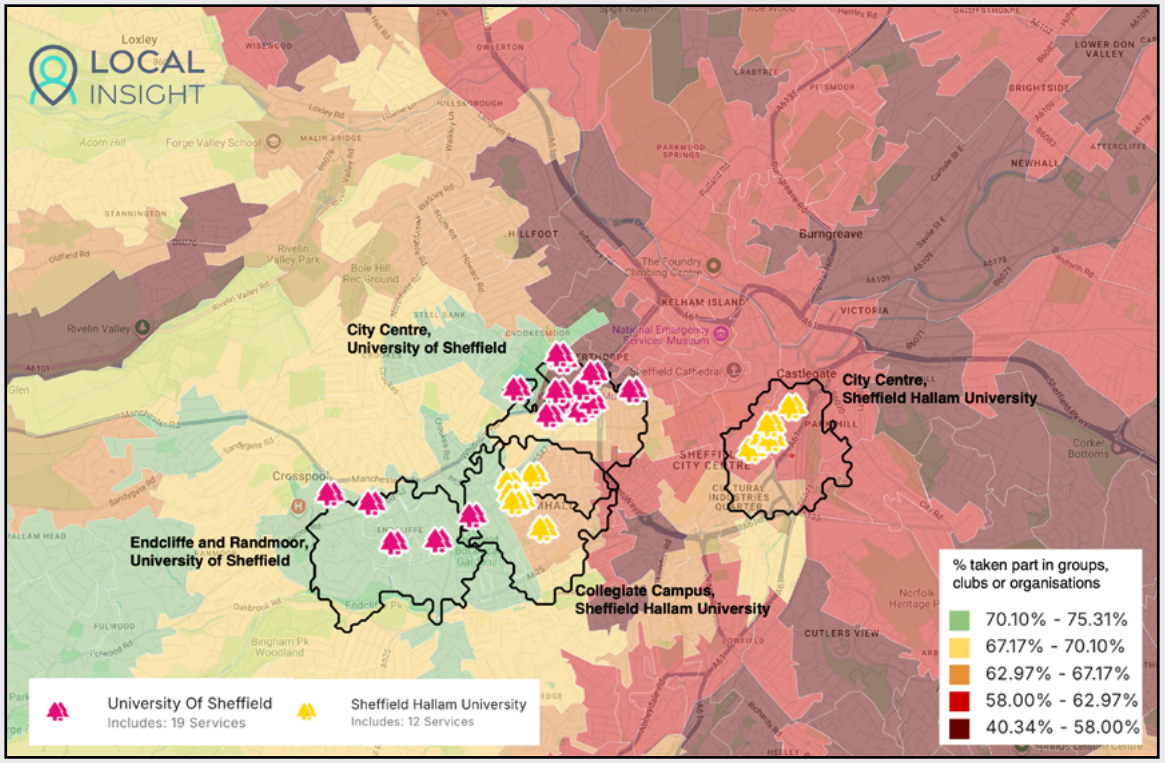


Figure 13. Sheffield, Addresses with private outdoor space, LSOA

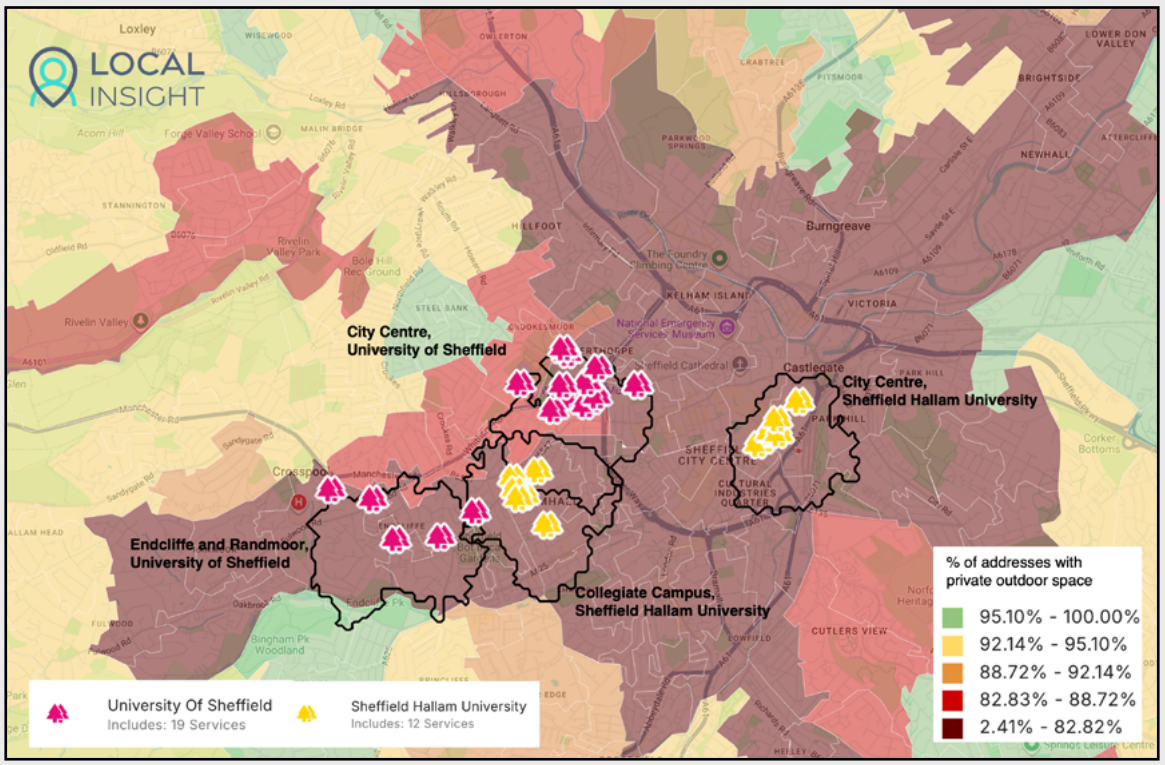


Table 8. Sheffield, key mental health and wellbeing data

Area		Small Area Mental Health Index	Active adults (age 16+)	Taken part in groups, clubs or organisations	Addresses with private outdoor space
	England	0.67	62%	64%	88%
	Sheffield	0.93	65%	62%	86%
University of Sheffield	**City Centre**	-0.42	72%	67%	44%
	Endcliffe and Randmoor	-0.94	76%	71%	56%
Sheffield Hallam University	**City Centre**	-0.09	73%	62%	63%
	Collegiate	-0.04	72%	67%	56%

Data highlighted green better than local authority average.
Data highlighted pink worse than local authority average.

The data from Sheffield illustrates that the university campuses are located in neighbourhoods with lower mental health need than the city as a whole, as well as in areas with adults that are more active, and already taking part in groups, clubs or organisations. The exception is that all campuses are located in areas with lower access to private outdoor space than the city overall.

The mapping also illustrates how concentrated the Sheffield campuses are – the University of Sheffield City Centre campus, SHU's Collegiate campus, and University of Sheffield's Endcliffe and Randmoor campus have overlapping walking radii. These campuses are primarily located in the west of the city, which in general are areas of lower need. This raises an interesting question of how the universities might support other areas of the city (ie, to the north and east of the city centre).

To the north of the University of Sheffield's City Centre campus is an area (Upperthorpe, Netherthorpe and Langsett) that consistently occurs as an area of higher need. This could potentially be an area to focus civic activities going forward.

Identifying best practice and challenges

Our mapping shows that the University of Sheffield's green spaces are in areas of notable privilege – with positive outcomes across all metrics identified. The civic challenge for the University of Sheffield is how to adopt approaches that decrease the divide in the outcomes mapped across the city. There is huge potential to work collaboratively with SHU to develop a shared approach that works for the city as a whole, and invites more people to their green spaces, to use their facilities, and to host more activities and events for their neighbouring communities.

Empowering estates teams

The University of Sheffield campus has evolved significantly over the last 10 to 15 years, from predominantly being a manicured lawn space to one that has increased biodiversity of flora and fauna, has 10,400 mature trees, and more than 1,000 square meters of perennial meadows. They are continuing to work towards their guiding principles and achieve a year-round restorative campus that supports wellbeing.

When asked, the landscape manager at the university said the biggest enabler in having a positive impact on the university's green spaces was bringing the landscape management – designing, procuring, planting, maintaining – fully in-house.

This enabled them to manage the university's green space efficiently and with a long-term plan. It enabled a consistent, planned approach. University green spaces are living ecosystems, and it can take three to four years to deliver a noticeable improvement. For many universities, this is a significant investment, requiring a high degree of trust and patience. Additional value of delivering this work in-house is retaining the power to recruit and train, building a team that's working towards a shared plan. As they candidly reflected: 'Put the wrong person in our landscape for a week, and they could ruin 10 years of work'. This has a benefit for the operatives too as they can learn and develop on-the-job as skilled workers.

University of Sheffield staff made clear that resourcing, investing in, and strategically backing the people that look after a university's green spaces are key to improving the landscape.

Public access vs a welcomed public

A topic that many interviewees reflected on in Sheffield was the extent to which university green spaces are truly public.

The spaces – and many of the facilities - are often technically publicly accessible, meaning they can be used by anyone, and that open spaces are never locked. Despite this, they may not feel like spaces that welcome the public; there's a gulf between telling people not to come in, and actively inviting them.

This difference is important when thinking through the civic impact that university green spaces are able to achieve. SHU's Collegiate campus has a lot of open green space, but it is still a campus primarily for students. This may dissuade local communities – living in the densely populated neighbouring area off Ecclesfield Road – from using the spaces and experiencing the benefits of the site.

Interviewees reflected on how valuable the University of Sheffield's gym and sports field facilities are. Although all are available for the public to use and hire, our interviewees said they rarely saw people not affiliated with the university in some way using those spaces.

Not all university spaces need to become fully public spaces – students remain key stakeholders – but if universities aspire to be civic institutions, then how they manage their green spaces becomes a question of civic and public interest. This research suggests that more can be done to invite neighbouring communities in through creative programming, discounted offers, or events to encourage the use of facilities people already technically have access to. This can be particularly effective in between terms, when the student population drops, and demand for these facilities drops too.

Key findings

- **Prioritise people** empowering in-house university estates teams with appropriate skills, resources, and long-term planning authority can create environments that support both biodiversity and human wellbeing. Institutional commitment to a multi-year vision challenges universities' often short-term financial planning cycles.

- **Reduce inequalities** Working with local data on mental health and wellbeing can ensure universities are meeting the communities in most need in the places where they are based.

NEWCASTLE

Newcastle is a major city in the North-east of England, and home to two major universities – Newcastle University founded in 1963, and Northumbria University established as a university in 1992. The two universities partnered together to agree a collaborative University Agreement in 2021.[26]

Newcastle University's main campus is towards the north of the city – and has been awarded Green Flag status. The university also has farmland, and extensive sports facilities outside of the main city centre. Northumbria University is based around two main sites, its city centre campus, and the Coach Lane campus.

Across Newcastle, the prevalence of mental health conditions has increased in recent years and is now higher than the rate for England as a whole.[27] The city has also seen an overall increase in those with a long-term mental health condition (lasting longer than 12 months).[28]

Our mapping work identified 27 university green spaces across the two institutions.

Table 9. Newcastle's university green spaces

University	Campus	Number of green spaces identified
Newcastle University	King's	10
	Farms	2
	Sports	6
Northumbria University	Other	2
	City	3
	Coach Lane	3

Mapping the data

Over the next two pages are maps of Newcastle's university green spaces, including an outline of the campuses' immediate neighbourhood (ie, a 10-minute walk radius from campus). This can help understand how the campus neighbourhoods compare to the city as a whole and see where the universities green space assets are located in relation to the rest of the city.

26 The Collaborative Newcastle Universities Agreement: Place-based action to boost social mobility and drive inclusive economic growth across Newcastle and the North East of England.

27 Joint Strategic Needs Assessment. Mental Health in Newcastle. Newcastle City Council.

28 Ibid.

Figure 14. Newcastle, Small Area Mental Health Index, LSOA

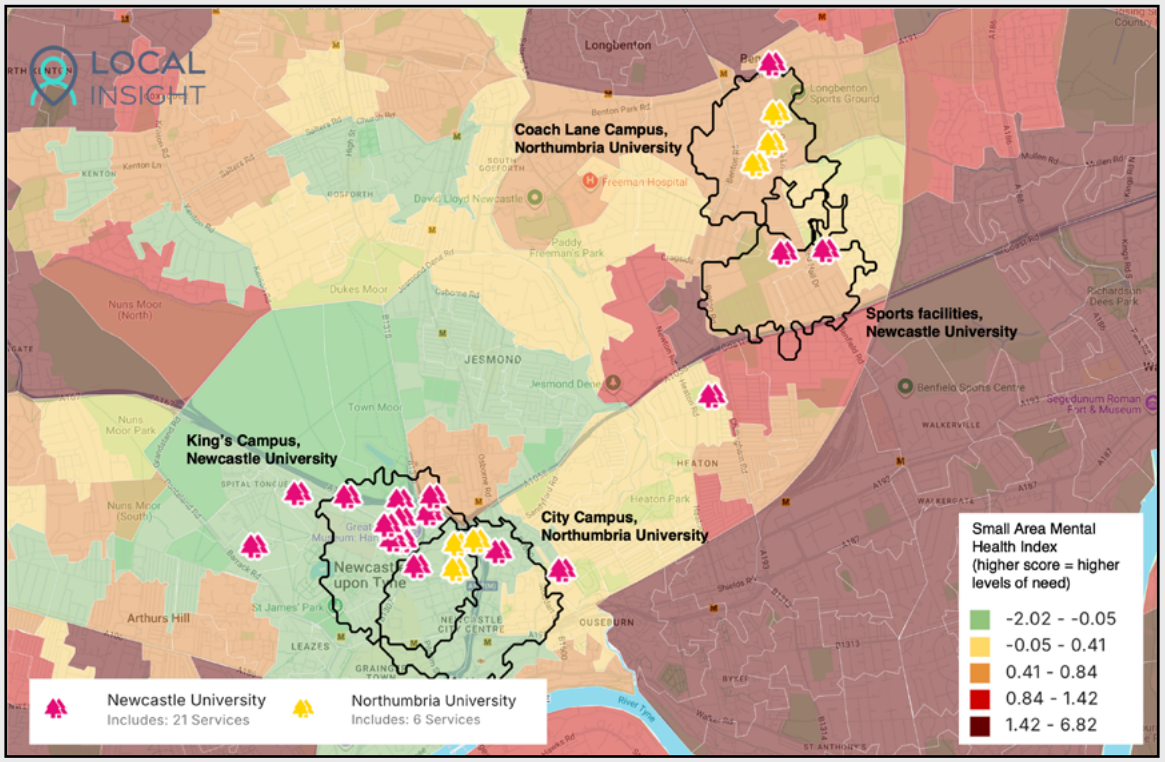


Figure 15. Newcastle, Active adults, LSOA

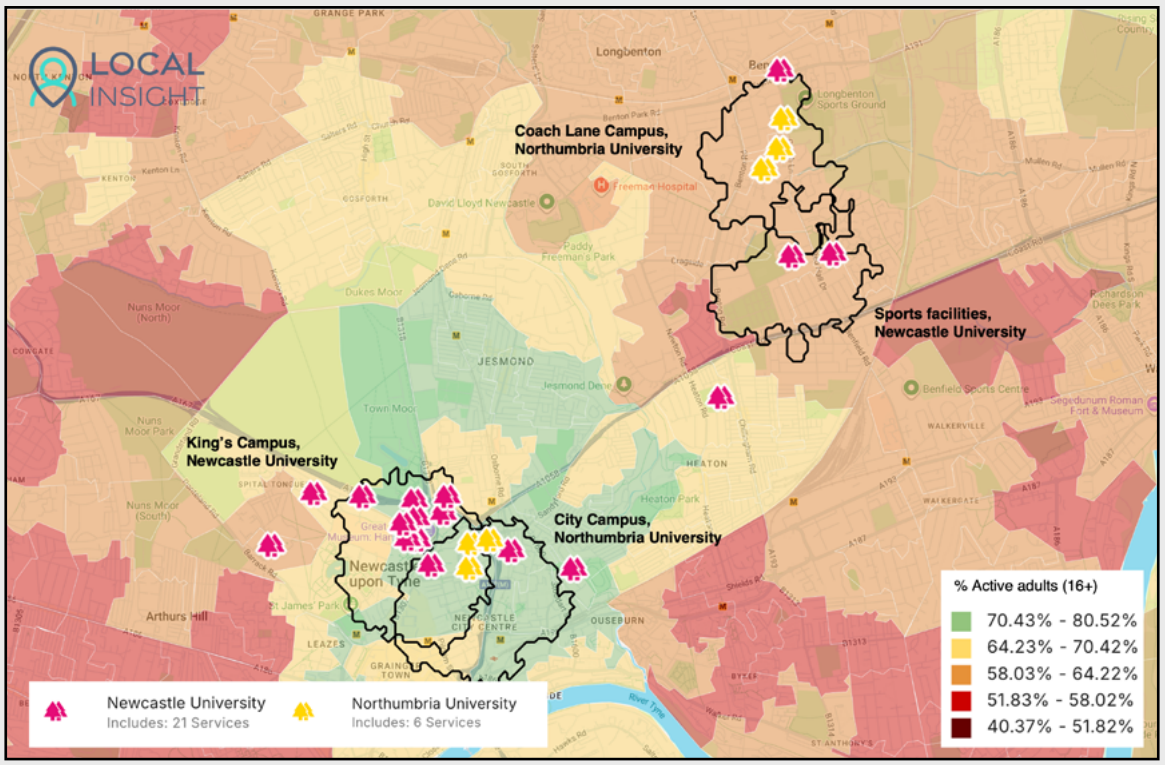


Figure 16. Newcastle, Taken part in groups clubs or organisations, LSOA

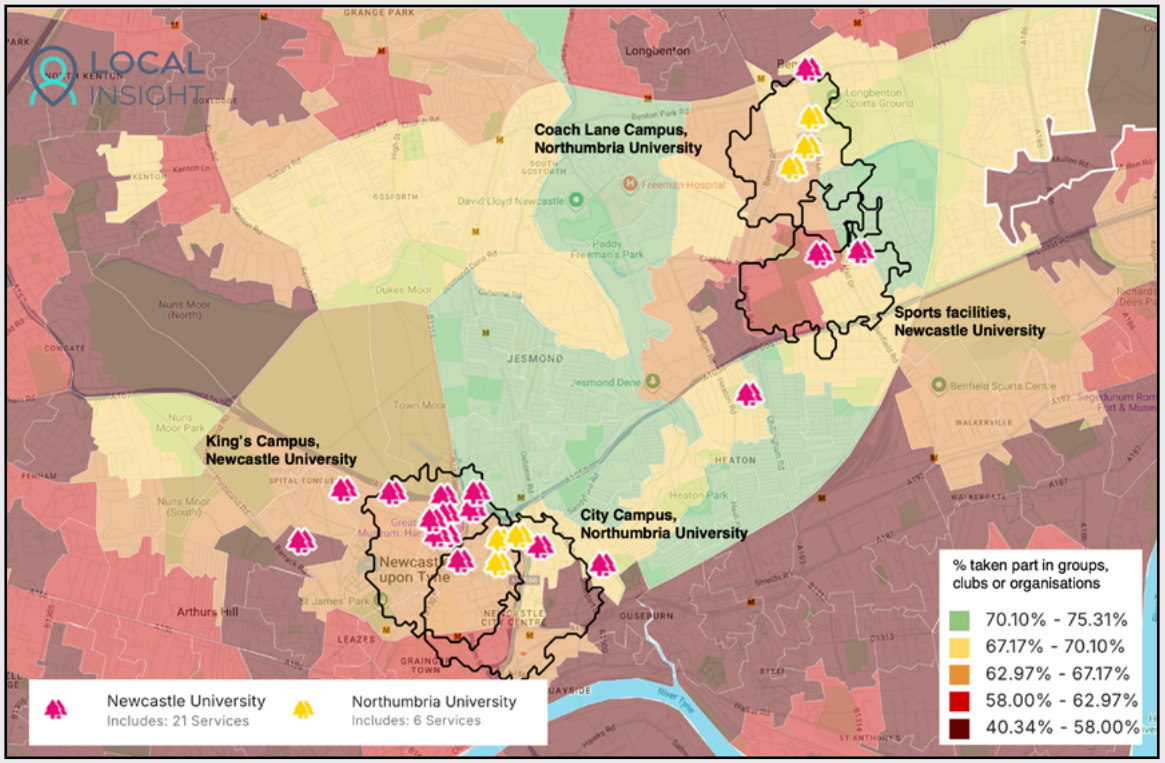


Figure 17. Newcastle, Addresses with private outdoor space, LSOA

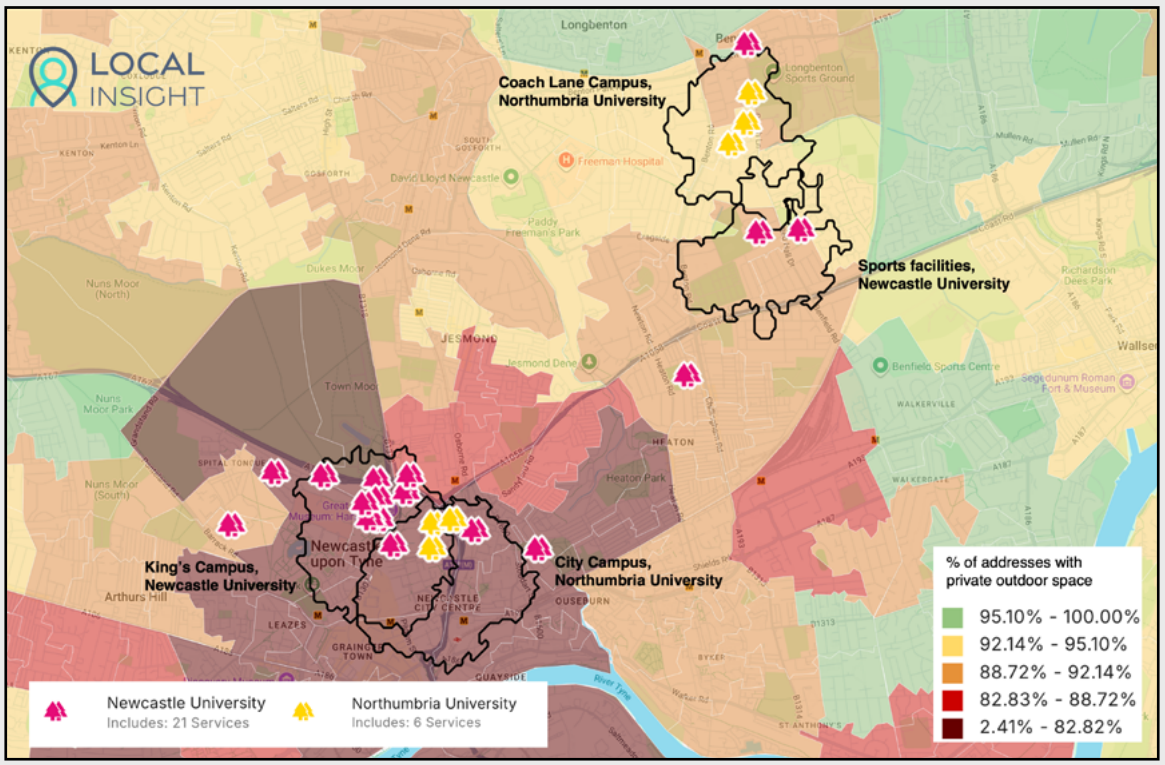


Table 10. Newcastle, key mental health and wellbeing data

Area		Small Area Mental Health Index	Active adults (age 16+)	Taken part in groups, clubs or organisations	Addresses with private outdoor space
	England	0.67	62%	64%	88%
	Newcastle	1.02	61%	61%	86%
Newcastle University	**King's**	-0.63	70%	66%	41%
	Sports	0.65	63%	70%	92%
Northumberland University Newcastle	**City Centre**	-0.34	72%	63%	49%
	Coach Lane	0.55	63%	66%	94%

Data highlighted green better than local authority average.
Data highlighted pink worse than local authority average.

The data for Newcastle follows the pattern of the other case study locations; the campuses are located in areas that have lower mental health need than the city as a whole, greater levels of active adults, and higher rates of people taking part in groups, clubs or organisations. The city centre campuses are located in areas with lower-than-average access to private outdoor space – whereas the campuses to the north-east of the city centre have higher than average access.

One striking feature of mapping the city as a whole is the clear disparity that exists between areas based to the west of the metro line, versus the areas based to the east of the metro line. The areas to the east have higher levels of need that the centre of the city, where both universities are concentrated.

Northumbria's Coach Lane campus and Newcastle Universities sports facilities – located to the northeast of the city centre – are located in areas of higher need. These facilities would benefit from developing civic impact in relation to mental health and wellbeing outcomes.

Identifying best practice and challenges

The mapping work illustrates a disparity in the green space assets that each university in the city has to hand. However, our interviews highlight how this is not necessarily an impediment to delivering civic impact. Researchers at Northumbria University are working to transform space beyond the campus to ensure communities of need enjoy the benefits of green space. The case of Newcastle University highlights the dilemmas involved in managing university green space as public space.

Looking beyond the campus

Our mapping work identified six university green spaces associated with Northumbria University – far fewer than the 21 associated with Newcastle University. Yet, this has not been an impediment to researchers at Northumbria University delivering impact in relation to green space beyond the campus itself. Three projects are worth briefly highlighting:

1. 'Brown to Green' is a participatory neighbourhood planning initiative that aimed to empower citizens to shape the vision for post-industrial waterfront areas. Using innovative methods – such as augmented reality apps – the researchers were able to work with local residents to reinvent existing spaces as green spaces. They were then able to convene key stakeholders (local authorities, industry, and community organisations) to develop proposals for new green spaces on Tyneside. This project provides a template for how universities can act as key brokers between community interests and traditional land management processes.

2. Urban Green Newcastle was a six-year process (2019 – 2025) to transfer care and ownership of the city's parks and allotments back to Newcastle City Council. Alongside the National Trust, Newcastle City Council, Newcastle Hospitals Charity Community Foundation, and The National Lottery Heritage Fund, Northumbria University was a close partner with the project. Students from the university led a 'No Mow May' initiative with local communities, researchers provided science support to the beeline initiative (establishing 1,815 sqm of pollinator friendly space), which evolved into the wider Nature Network initiative. The university is also undertaking the wider piece of research 'Innovation, Co-Governance and Democracy in Urban Greenspaces' using Urban Green Newcastle as the principal case study.

3. In July 2025, it was announced that a researcher at Northumbria will be part of a £3m collaborative project to create 35 miles of new 'Green Corridors' in the North-east of England. Although only announced two months ago (at the time of writing), it suggests a continuation of researchers at Northumbria working to create new green spaces beyond the campus – and demonstrate how that can be achieved.

Is a university green space a public space?

One of the tensions that has run through this research has been the extent to which university green space should be conceptualised as public spaces.

It is clear for the most part that universities view their green spaces as principally for students. However, many campuses are publicly accessible, and the general public are allowed to use their green spaces. Moreover, this work highlights the benefits that might be achieved if these green space assets were recognised as civic assets to support neighbouring communities.

One of the barriers to realising this is the extent to which university management practices are grounded on the premise that these spaces are for students. At Newcastle University, despite their King's Campus being award the prestigious Green Flag Award every year for the last decade, the feedback they have received underscores where the university green space fails to meet some of the expectations of green spaces as public spaces.

Their feedback highlights the lack of appropriate signage welcoming people to the space, and that it is unclear whether the public can access supportive amenities (toilets, cafes, etc). From the perspective of the Green Flag Award and their judging criteria these are areas where the university might become more of 'A Welcoming Place' and 'Healthy, Safe and Secure'.

If university green spaces are to realise their potential as civic spaces, then feedback from organisations such as the Green Flag Award can help identify areas of improvement for enhancing how public university green spaces look and feel.

Key findings

- **Limited green space assets need not constrain civic impact** when universities leverage research expertise and partnership capabilities: Northumbria University's experience demonstrates that institutions with fewer on-campus green spaces can achieve significant civic impact by applying their research capacity to create new green infrastructure beyond their boundaries.

- **Work with data to identify areas of focus** The striking divide in mental health and wellbeing outcomes identified by the mapping highlights how university green space assets are not often located in the areas where they may be needed most. Some universities need to think creatively about how to connect communities with assets.

BACK TO CONTENTS

5 Cross-cutting findings

This research reveals a lot about how universities are currently managing their green spaces. It surfaces some excellent best practice from universities making the most of their green space assets. At the same time, it shows how challenging it can be for estates teams, engaged academics, interested students, and local communities to meaningfully shape university green space in civic directions.

Renewed interest post-Covid-19

Many interview participants said interest in university green space as an asset that supports mental health and wellbeing surged after the Covid-19 pandemic. This moment showcased how important these spaces are for creating spaces of respite. During the pandemic, these green spaces were places where people could socialise at a distance in a well-ventilated environment.

If the pandemic was the test-case for how important these spaces are from a health and wellbeing perspective, the challenge now is to build on that legacy, and ensure these spaces aren't only thriving for when the next pandemic arrives but actively support health and wellbeing on a day-to-day basis.

An evolving discipline

Different estates teams from different universities shared a similar story about how their journey from (near) exclusively providing manicured lawns, through to actively cultivating diverse wildflower landscapes. This is a positive journey from a biodiversity perspective.

The challenge now is to continue this evolution so that university estates teams deliberately plan how the biological and social dynamics of these spaces interrelate. Practically, this means thinking through how different environments encourage different kinds of use. Acre after acre of wildflower meadow would no doubt be great for bees, but to best support the needs of students, staff, and local communities it is important to plan the different kinds of use in each space and reflect on how horticulture might best support that use.

Developing a community of practice

Through interviews emerged an appetite for developing a community of practice around green space management. Estate teams from different universities were both eager to invite colleagues from different institutions to come and see their sites and ways of working, and also to learn from other institutions (both within the UK, and around the world) about what is working well.

This happens in a relatively ad-hoc way at the moment, but there is scope to develop a coherent community of practice around university green space management. In practice this may look like regular annual conferences, place-based knowledge exchanges between institutions, or – more ambitiously – innovative challenge prizes that push groups of estates teams to deliver particular outcomes.

A prevailing financial logic

One finding that emerged from our interviews – and supports the research on the wider state of the sector [29] – is the way that the financial logics of universities filters through into the day-to-day decision-making about green space. Estates teams shared the pressures they feel to think about the needs of students as their 'primary customers and clients'; the challenges maximising the potential income of every square metre of land on a campus; and expectations to deliver more with less as interest in biodiverse environments increases while financial resource remains static.

In many ways, this is unsurprising, given the financial pressures that many universities are experiencing. However, within this raw cost-benefit analysis of green space, many positive unquantifiable impacts are missed. How do you quantify the value of friendships made and sustained? Of wellbeing supported? Of improved connections with neighbouring communities? Some teams are beginning to think through how they might demonstrate impact on student satisfaction, performance and retention. But this prevailing financial logic runs the risk of being antithetical to the civic potential of universities in place.

Overlooked and underappreciated spaces

The first finding of this research – and one that has been difficult to shake – was how difficult it is to identify these green spaces. Campus maps rarely identify them beyond background green 'blobs' surrounding named buildings. If this is frustrating for us as researchers actively looking for green space, then it's fair to assume a student is unlikely to go out of their way to learn about the breadth and depth of green spaces their institution has to offer. One interviewee was understandably baffled by the number of comments from students at the end of their degree requesting the provision of spaces that already exist.

This means that students are unlikely to be making the most of the green space assets at their disposal, and the different typologies of green space a university provides will be unclear. However, it will be even more opaque to neighbouring communities who don't 'belong to' the university – what spaces does this institution on their doorstep have? What parts do they have access to and when? Can they use the toilets or café? The fact this information is rarely easily publicly accessible means these assets are some way off realising their civic potential.

29 Dobson, J. (2025) Civic capitals at risk: The fragile foundations of the civic university. National Civic Impact Accelerator.

BACK TO CONTENTS

6 Conclusions and recommendations

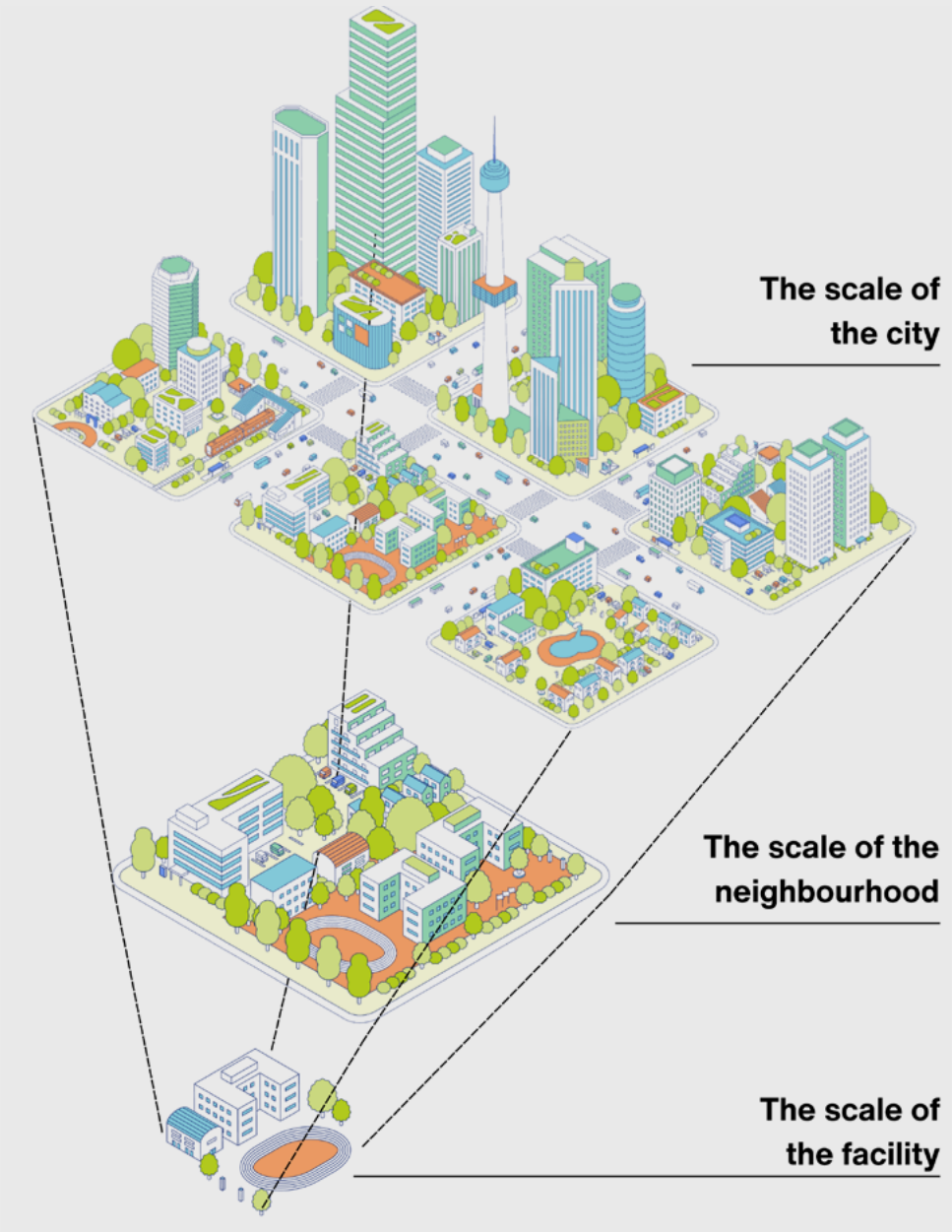
This research highlights ways that universities can maximise the impact of their green spaces.

In realising the potential of their green space assets, it can be helpful to imagine their impact unfolding at multiple scales (see figure 18). A green space will have immediate impact at the scale of the facility, but also on the surrounding neighbourhood. Universities as civic anchors can also have an impact at the scale of the city as a whole.

This framework can also help universities to imagine how small-scale interventions at the facility level can potentially scale up to affect the overall character of a city as whole.

Our recommendations therefore assess these three scales: of the facility, the neighbourhood, and the city – making five recommendations for each that can hopefully support estates teams, public engagement teams, staff, academics, students, and senior leaders to imagine how their green spaces might have greater impact.

Figure 18. The interconnected scales of social infrastructure. Source: Latham, A. and Layton, J. (2026) Social Infrastructure in Neighbourhoods and Cities. Policy Press.



Small scale: the facility

- **Make university green spaces visible and welcoming** naming and describing them on university campus maps, particularly online. All campus entrances should have clear, inviting and informative signage about what is available and for who. This will not only support students to make better use of the campus but invite neighbouring communities to spend time in and make use of these assets too.

- **Focus on biodiversity and multifunctional use through more holistic design and management approaches.** Rather than just planting for planting's sake, this is about understanding how green space design can enhance difference uses and activities. For example, showing how green space can promote re-connection with nature, or relieve stress and improve mental wellbeing, or provide spaces that are comfortable for socialising, exercising, or growing food.

- **Collaborate to maximise the impact of university green spaces.** Many different stakeholders can feed into the design, management, and understanding of university green spaces – including, but not limited to: estate teams, student wellbeing services, catering teams, student sports and fitness societies, course convenors, public engagement teams, and research directors.

- **Put in place university green space risk assessments** to understand what could be lost due to development and make this a part of wider university policies. Done well, this would capture existing impact of university green spaces, and the impact their loss might have on student wellbeing, performance and retention, helping green spaces become strategically protected assets.

- **Applying for Green Flag Awards** recognising university green spaces as institutional and city assets. Going through the application itself can highlight areas of improvement and development for the campus, for example this can be done by scoring the campus against how welcoming it is.

Mid-scale: the neighbourhood

- **Understand your neighbours** invest in participatory research and mapping methods to reveal hidden place experiences, build connections between universities and local communities, and co-produce plans and priorities for university green spaces. At a minimum, universities can access publicly available data to understand the broad characteristics of the places that they're located, such as through the Civic Impact Dashboard and Place Navigator.

- **Create networks of connected green spaces** It is important to understand how university green spaces fit within the wider green landscape of local places. Where possible, aim to create green corridors that connect green spaces together. This might also involve planning how the resources and amenities university green spaces offer compliments existing green space assets in the local area.

- **Programme activities for neighbouring communities** sports, fitness, arts, culture, gardening, growing, eating, and making activities can invite new people into university green spaces.

- **Develop participatory governance approaches.** Many of the UK's parks benefit from having 'Friends of' groups as key stakeholders. Universities could develop such groups to feed into how their green spaces are looked after, creating sites of meaningful engagement and collaboration between university staff, students and local communities.

- **Encourage student volunteering in local green** inviting students as well as local communities to be active participants in neighbourhood green spaces, by organising activities or litter-picking to contribute to general upkeep.

Large-scale: the city

- **Build partnerships with wider place-based anchor institutions.** Universities have significant convening power and roots in the places that they're located. As such they are well places to work with other place-based anchor institutions – local authorities, NHS trusts, community organisations, and schools – to share best practice, align priorities, and develop learning. Universities can be at the forefront of ensuring the management of university green spaces for health and wellbeing is a priority in for every town and city across the UK.

- **Be custodians of central urban green space.** Universities are in the privileged position of retaining centrally located green space in built-up urban environments. As civic institutions, universities should feel the weight of this responsibility and ensure the green spaces they look after live up to their potential and become lasting, regenerative, resources for local communities.

- **Address city-wide inequalities.** Universities are not always located in areas of mental health and wellbeing need. As universities develop their estates across urban areas, they should consider how re-greening can fit into wider estate planning and how new satellite sites could create green spaces in areas of need.

- **Provide unique assets.** Many university towns and cities across the UK already have a great number of public parks alongside their university green spaces. Universities should plan strategically for how they can provide unique, place-specific kinds of green space that complement the green spaces already available to the public, plug gaps in facilities and meet different needs.

- **Work with local NHS trusts to develop city-wide approaches to social prescribing.** To ensure their green spaces deliver mental health and wellbeing outcomes, universities can work with local NHS trusts to pro-actively bring people in need of support onto university campuses for physical activity, volunteering, gardening, of forest-bathing.

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