

# **HDRC Southampton**

## **Return on investment for parks evidence review**

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## 1. Background

This evidence review centres around the crucial role parks play in improving the well-being of local communities, offering both direct and indirect returns on investment. These green spaces contribute significantly to physical and mental health, social inclusion, and local economies. Understanding the return on investment (ROI) for parks is essential for local governments to justify the funding and development of public parks and recreational areas. This review aims to gather evidence of the financial and social returns generated by investments in parks. The findings of this review will help councils demonstrate the broader value of parks, reinforcing the need for continued or increased investment.

## 2. Methodology

A broad search with the phrase ‘return on investment on parks’ was conducted on Google Scholar and the basic google search engine. From the search results, studies were selected based on relevance to the ROI of parks. Four studies were included in the review and findings were grouped into themes

## 3. Findings

The findings on the return of investment on parks are grouped into various themes, as set out below. These findings are also supported by the rapid review from the [Heritage Fund called Space to Thrive](#).

The findings are broken down into three areas of impact. Using the results of three studies as linked below.

- Edinburgh City Council’s [Parks and Greenspace service](#)
- National Recreation and Parks Association (NRPA) [Economic Impact of Parks - An examination of the fiscal effects of operations and capital spending by Local Park and Recreation Agencies on the U.S. economy](#)
- Parliamentary evidence submitted by the [National Trust \(PKS 0408\)](#) - evidence submitted to the Communities and Local Government Committee in the UK Parliament in July 2016.

### 3.1 The economic impact

Looking at the economic impact of parks from each report found:

Edinburgh City Council’s Parks and Greenspace Service found that:

- For every £1 invested, £12 in benefits are generated

- Parks contribute £51 million in additional revenue for local businesses through visitor spending

The NRPA found that local park and recreation agencies:

- Generated over \$201 billion in economic activity in 2021
- Supported nearly 1.1 million jobs and contributed over \$63 billion in labour income
- Properties near parks have higher values, boosting local tax bases
- Parks enhance community quality of life, attracting businesses and residents. 87% of corporate executives cited quality-of-life features as factors in business location decisions
- Parks attract tourists, boosting local economies through increased spending in restaurants, bars, and hotels

The National Trust found that:

- For every £1 spent by the Council, £34 of value is delivered
- Parks outperform traditional infrastructure investments, with a benefit-to-cost ratio of 34:1 compared to 4:1 for road projects

### **3.2 Health and Wellbeing**

When looking at health and wellbeing, the Edinburgh City Council's Parks and Greenspace Service found that parks provide £40.5 million in health benefits, enhancing both individual and community health.

The NRPA found that for local park and recreation agencies:

- Parks contribute to improved physical and mental health, reducing medical and insurance costs
- 93% of adults reported improved mental health due to park services (2021)
- 83% agreed that recreational areas are essential for healthy lifestyles (2023)

The National Trust found that:

- 60% of benefits from parks come from physical and mental health improvements, including reduced risks of circulatory diseases and lower burdens of depression and cardiovascular dementia
- Healthier populations lead to increased workforce productivity

The Greater London Authority, National Trust and Heritage Lottery Fund produced a report called [Natural capital accounts for public green space in London \(2017\)](#) and found that public green spaces save £370 million annually through better mental well-being, equivalent to £42 per person per year.

### 3.3 Environmental impact and conservation

When looking at the environmental impact and conservation elements included:

The National Recreation and Parks Association (NRPA) Economic Impact of Parks found that:

- Parks improve air and water quality, protect natural resources, and help mitigate natural disasters
- Investments in green infrastructure reduce disaster recovery and insurance costs
- 93% of respondents (2019) supported maintaining local parks to protect the environment

The National Trust evidence highlighted that parks improve air quality, climate resilience, and environmental sustainability.

### 3.4 Community and Social Impact

The Edinburgh City Council's Parks and Greenspace Service reports found that parks foster over £6 million in social inclusion and community capacity, strengthening community ties and inclusivity

The National Recreation and Parks Association (NRPA) Economic Impact of Parks found that:

- Parks provide safe, inclusive spaces that foster cohesive, resilient communities
- 6 in 7 adults supported environmental initiatives by park agencies in 2023

The National Trust evidence found that:

- Parks contribute to community resilience, supporting stronger community ties through access to public spaces
- 90%+ of adults reported that summer activities in parks create fond memories (2021)

## 4. Conclusion

Given the documented economic, health, environmental and social benefits of parks, it is crucial to continue supporting their funding. Local park and recreation agencies not only enhance the standard of living in our communities but also stimulate economic activity, creating jobs and fostering long-term prosperity. Rather than reducing investments in parks, councils should focus on securing additional funding to maintain and improve these valuable spaces.