

Baroness Lane-Fox of Soho  
Chair, COVID-19 Committee  
House of Lords  
London  
SW1A 0PW

06 July 2021

Dear Lady Lane-Fox,

I write in response to the COVID-19 Committee's call for evidence for its inquiry into *the long-term impact of the pandemic on towns and cities*.

As the Committee will be aware, the Office for National Statistics (ONS) is the National Statistical Institute for the UK and the largest producer of official statistics. The ONS aims to provide a firm evidence base for sound decisions and develop the role of official statistics in democratic debate.

We have focussed this evidence on the impacts of the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic on access to both public and private greenspaces. We have also provided our latest analysis on the effects of the pandemic on the attitudes of businesses and workers towards the future of working practises.

I hope the Committee finds this submission useful. Please do not hesitate to contact me if I can be of any assistance.

Yours sincerely,



**Jonathan Athow**

Deputy National Statistician and Director General, Economic Statistics

## **Office for National Statistics (ONS) written evidence – The long-term impact of the pandemic on towns and cities**

### **Green Spaces**

In May 2020, in collaboration with Ordnance Survey, the ONS produced analysis of variable access to gardens and public greenspace in Great Britain<sup>1</sup>. This work was based on both survey work from Natural England<sup>2</sup> and analysis of the Ordnance Survey's MasterMap<sup>3</sup>.

#### **Private Gardens**

One in eight households (12%) in Great Britain has no access to a private or shared garden during the coronavirus (COVID-19) lockdown. This rises to more than one in five households in London (21%) with no access to a private or shared garden. Gardens in London are 26% smaller than the national average and the smallest of any region or country in Great Britain.

We found that ethnic minorities and more deprived socioeconomic groups had significantly less access to private gardens. In England, Black respondents were nearly four times as likely as White respondents to have no access to outdoor space at home, whether it be a private or shared garden, a patio or a balcony (37% compared with 10%) according to Natural England's Monitoring Engagement with the Natural Environment (MENE) survey.

#### **Public Parks**

More than a quarter of people (28%) in Great Britain live within 300m as the crow flies of a public park, while 72% live fewer 900m. Parks are most accessible in the poorest areas, with people in the most deprived neighbourhoods of England around twice as likely as those in the least deprived to be within five minutes' walk of a public park (34% compared with 18%). 44% of London residents are within 300m of a park. The highest of any region or country in Great Britain.

Access to public parks is more evenly distributed, with people from minority ethnic groups almost as likely as White people to say their local greenspaces are "within easy walking distance" (86% compared with 88%).

#### **Use of Greenspace during lockdown**

The publication, "*How has lockdown changed our relationship with nature?*"<sup>4</sup> collates a range of data sources to examine use of the outdoors during lockdown.

Between 7 and 11 April 2021, the ONS found that 28% of working adults worked exclusively from home. More than three-quarters (76%) of people who only worked from home in this period left home for exercise in the previous seven days, compared with 52% of people who travelled to work. Those working from home were also more likely to visit a park or local green space than those who travelled to work (45% compared with 30%).

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.ons.gov.uk/releases/accesstogardensandpublicgreenspaceingreatbritain>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/monitor-of-engagement-with-the-natural-environment-survey-purpose-and-results>

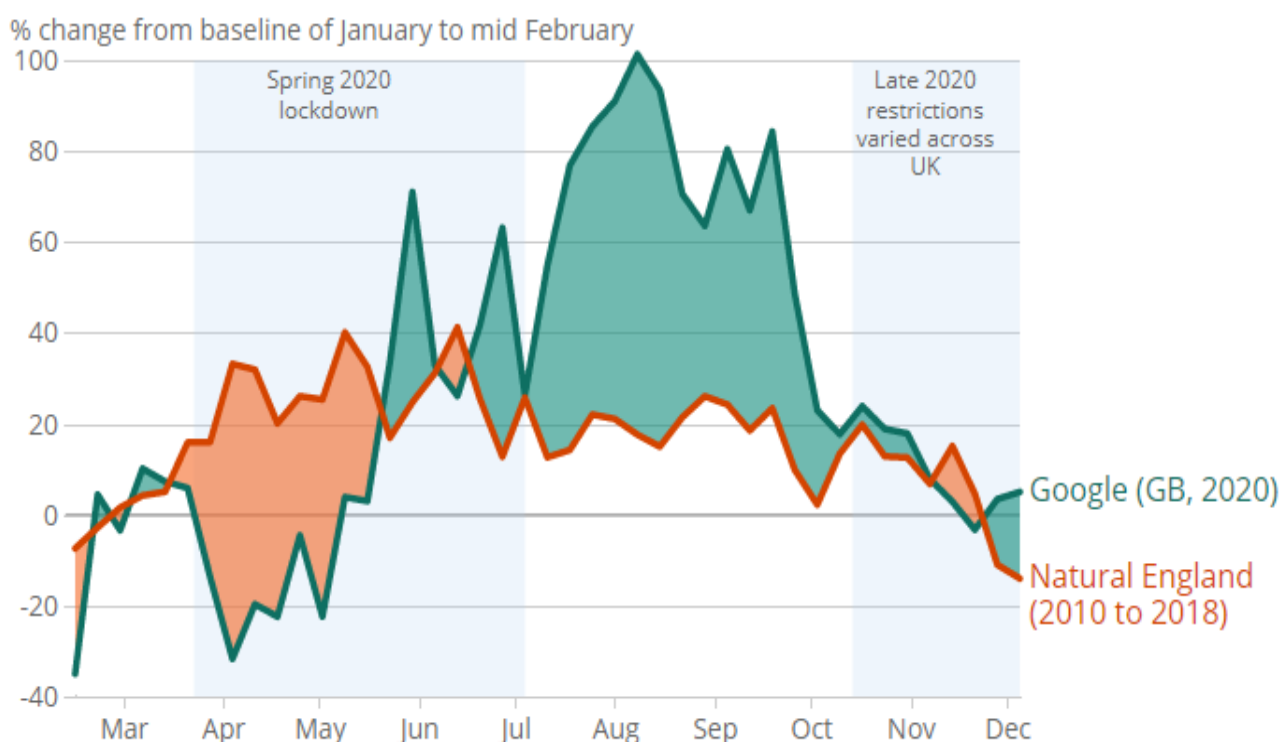
<sup>3</sup> <https://www.ordnancesurvey.co.uk/business-government/products>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.ons.gov.uk/economy/environmentalaccounts/articles/howhaslockdownchangedourrelationshipwithnature/2021-04-26>

Use of parks and public green spaces were up on previous years during summer 2020. Figure 2 shows how google mobility data for 2020 compared to the average use of parks in previous years based on Natural England’s MENE data.

**Figure 2:** Change in mobility to parks and public green spaces compared with a baseline period (3 January to 6 February 2020), Google mobility (UK, 2020) compared with Natural England (England, 2009 to 2018)

**More** or **less** visits to and time spent in parks in 2020 compared with a normal year.



**Source:** Google – COVID-19 Community Mobility Reports, Natural England – Monitor of Engagement with the Natural Environment

MENE has recently been replaced by the People and Nature Survey (PANS) which reported throughout 2020 with experimental data. In May 2020, 36% of people responding to PANS said they were spending more time outside during the pandemic than before. This rose to 46% in July 2020.

In lockdown, those living closer to their nearest public green space were more likely to visit than those living further away. In the summer, after lockdown, the opposite was true, with people living further away from their nearest green space more likely to visit than those living closer.

This report also pointed to New Economics Foundation analysis<sup>5</sup> that highlighted concerns about overcrowding found that around one in eight people (12.5%) don’t believe that their

<sup>5</sup> <https://neweconomics.org/2021/01/escaping-green-deprivation>

local green space is of a high enough standard to want to spend time in. People on lower incomes report greater dissatisfaction with the quality of their green space than those on higher incomes.

## **The changing nature of employment**

The ONS has published analysis of the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on office working and of business and individual attitudes to future working practice<sup>6</sup>, which found the proportion of working adults who did any work from home in 2020 increased to 37% on average from 27% in 2019 with workers living in London the most likely to homework.

When asked about homeworking, working adults stated work-life balance was the greatest positive, while challenges of collaboration were the greatest negative.

Online job adverts including terms related to "homeworking" have increased at a faster rate than total adverts, with homeworking adverts in May 2021 three times above their February 2020 average.

Workers living in London were most likely to report working from home in the previous seven days. Those aged 30 to 49 years were most likely to report working from home, with almost half (45%) saying so compared with around one-third of those aged 16 to 29 years (34%) and 50 to 69 years (32%).

A similar proportion of businesses (31%) reported that their workforce was working remotely as restrictions eased in April and May 2021.

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<sup>6</sup><https://www.ons.gov.uk/employmentandlabourmarket/peopleinwork/employmentandemployeetypes/articles/businessandindividualattitudestowardsthefutureofhomeworkinguk/apriltomay2021>