

**Policy Brief – February 2024**

**Using wayfinding to increase access to public parks.**

**Summary**

- Equitable access to urban greenspace is a public health priority nationally and internationally.
- Knowledge of where people can walk is cited as a barrier to walking in greenspace.
- Therefore, the provision of wayfinding within greenspaces may remove, or at least alleviate, this barrier to enable more people to engage with and benefit from urban greenspaces.

**Introduction**

- There is an increasing evidence base for the potential health benefits of using urban greenspace. However, urban dwellers regularly report having limited contact with greenspaces, and thus, limited access to the potential health and wellbeing benefits of such spaces.
- Lack of knowledge about routes has been cited as a barrier to recreational walking in greenspace <sup>1</sup>.
- This policy brief brings together our local evidence from Northamptonshire, which explores visitors' views of, wants and needs for, and engagement with a wayfinding intervention to promote use of urban greenspace.

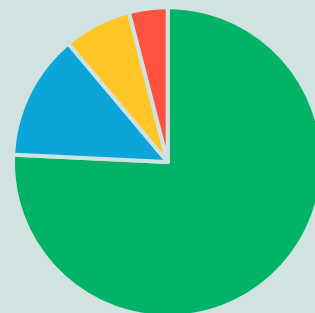
**Communities want wayfinding**

- Our research found that Northamptonshire communities thought the presence of wayfinding signs within greenspaces could increase their:
  - confidence to explore the space,
  - perceptions of safety,
  - motivations to walk further, and
  - reduce anxieties about getting lost in greenspace <sup>a</sup>.

**Recommendations**

- Park managers need to co-design with the local community which routes to promote and the design of wayfinding signs.
- Park Strategies need to state that wayfinding must be incorporated into large parks and green corridors.
- Design standards need to state that wayfinding materials need to be in-keeping with the natural environment.
- Design standards need to state that seating locations, footpath terrain, the presence of any physical barriers, and the distance of the routes need to be included on wayfinding.

**Preferred methods to aid navigation <sup>b</sup>**



■ Signs ■ Printed Maps ■ GPS Maps ■ Other

- Furthermore, we found that 33% and 41% of 266 respondents 'strongly agreed' or 'agreed' that wayfinding signs for recreational walking should be installed in public parks and footpaths, respectively (only 6% either disagreed or strongly disagreed) <sup>a</sup>.
- 75% of 305 Northamptonshire respondents stated that wayfinding signs would be the most helpful method to aid navigation of walking and cycling routes in Delapré Park <sup>b</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.research.ed.ac.uk/en/publications/barriers-and-facilitators-to-recreational-walking-an-evidence-rev>

## Wayfinding design

- Northamptonshire residents said that wayfinding signs should use materials that are in-keeping with the natural environment <sup>ad</sup>, as they often visit greenspaces to escape urban environments.

*“Signposts should not disturb the landscape they are installed in. E.g., not blight the beauty of the area.”* – evidence source: <sup>a</sup>

*“When you come for a walk like this you want to get into the fresh air, trees, grass. You don’t want to see that urban environment particularly. Pylons...city and developed life - it’s nice to be away from that.”* – evidence source: <sup>d</sup>

- Providing information about seating locations, footpath terrain, route lengths, and physical barriers are important to include on wayfinding, in residents’ opinions <sup>cd</sup>.

*“If I knew I could go to a bench, sit down and then come back again it would make me do it more, definitely.”* – evidence source: <sup>d</sup>

*“Knowing the sort of terrain you are walking on is really helpful if you have additional needs. I’ve sometimes had to turn back due to stiles which weren’t marked on a map or walk leaflet”* – evidence source: <sup>a</sup>

## Who benefits from wayfinding?

- Although our 12-month trial of a retro-fitted 3km signposted walking route within Delapré Park from 2021 to 2022 did not increase footfall on monitored paths, 23% of people walking along the route during an observation day said they were following the signposts <sup>c</sup>.
- Online intercept surveys accessed through the signposts suggested that 69% of people using the signposted walking route were new or infrequent visitors to Delapré Park <sup>c</sup>.
- Frequent visitors to Delapré Park appreciated the benefits of the signposted walking route for those who were infrequent visitors, but would not follow the signs themselves as they were already familiar with the park <sup>d</sup>.
- Therefore, wayfinding signs benefit new or infrequent park visitors by helping them explore unfamiliar paths and contributes to equitable use of urban greenspace.

*“This [the signposts] has enabled me to safely walk around an area I’m unfamiliar with.”* – evidence source: <sup>c</sup>

## Strengths and limitations of the evidence

- Online surveys were a convenience sampling approach therefore, those with the strongest positive and negative views would likely be attracted to participate.
- Evaluation of the signposted walking route used control parks and followed best practice guidance for natural experimental studies.

## Policy implications

- This evidence is relevant to policies that aim to increase population physical activity levels, health and well-being through the built and natural environment.
- Include a wayfinding strategy within planning and design standards to ensure policies promote equitable accessibility to urban greenspaces.



### Scan the QR Code

To access the research repository that includes all the associated research and data.

## Evidence Sources

a.2021 online survey of attitudes towards wayfinding with 266 respondents – [click here](#)

b.2022 online survey to explore the feasibility of a walking and cycling social prescription programme at Delapré Abbey, Northampton, with 305 respondents – [click here](#)

c.Natural experimental study of a retro-fitted 3km signposted walking route at Delapré Park, Northampton – [click here](#)

d.Intercept go-along interviews in Delapré Park, Northampton, with 28 participants – [click here](#)

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