

Protecting green spaces for perpetuity

Fields in Trust

The Challenge

- Create and share evidence of the need to protect parks and green spaces

The Benefits

- Evidence to support the case for legal protection
- Improved focus on areas of greatest need
- More purposeful engagements with stakeholders
- Successful media relations campaigns

The vital importance of Britain's green spaces was brought to the forefront of national attention during the COVID-19 lockdown. When almost all other leisure venues were closed, parks and recreation grounds provided safe places for people to exercise, enjoy the fresh air and meet others at a social distance. Fields in Trust has used ArcGIS to expose inequalities in access to green spaces and highlight the urgent need to protect these valued places for perpetuity.

The Challenge

Fields in Trust was founded in 1925, in the aftermath of the First World War, to create playing fields and save open spaces in congested towns and cities. Ninety five years later, the need for green spaces where people can exercise, relax and socialise is just as great as ever. The charity therefore continues to work with landowners, community groups and policy makers to instigate better protection for green spaces at both local and national level.

To help it raise awareness of why it is important to protect parks and green spaces, Fields in Trust wanted to adopt a more evidence-based approach to its work. In particular, the charity wanted to better understand how access to these spaces, close to home, varies for people across different nations and regions of Great Britain. It also wanted to be able to demonstrate the effect of changes in population meaning that more protected parks are needed to meet the needs of future generations.

The Solution

Fields in Trust now uses Esri's ArcGIS Desktop to carry out spatial analysis of Ordnance Survey's green space data and UK population data. Called the Green Space Index, this annual research project analyses the quantity of green space provision across nations and regions and against minimum standards. It also calculates the number of people who are not within a ten minute walk of a green space and takes into account factors such as the proportion of the available green space that is legally protected.

To present the findings of the Green Space Index, both internally and externally, Fields in Trust uses ArcGIS Online to create and publish web maps. The charity can efficiently build these interactive digital maps for specific audiences, such as a local authority, and embed additional spatial data, such as local health information, to illustrate the need for a green space in a particular locality. In the future, Fields in Trust also plans to produce further spatial analysis comparing the data from each year's Green Space Index with the data from previous years, to create a statistical barometer of the changing outlook for green space provision in Great Britain over time.

Fields in Trust also uses ArcGIS Online to create story maps that help it convey information about its work and the Green Space Index in a format that people will find engaging and easy to understand. For example, a story map produced in May 2020 includes interactive maps that clearly show the 100 local authority areas where the provision of green space per person will reduce by more than 10% in the next 20 years if nothing is done to increase the amount of available parks and recreation grounds in these areas.



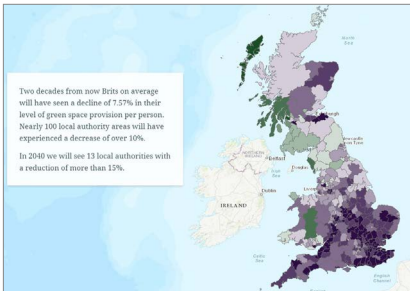
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Alison McCann, Policy Manager, Fields in Trust



An ArcGIS story map clearly shows variations in the level of green space provision per person

The Benefits

Evidence to support the case for legal protection

ArcGIS has given Fields in Trust the ability to obtain tangible evidence to strengthen its campaigns for protecting Britain’s existing green spaces. For example, the 2020 Green Space Index revealed that even if there is no loss of existing green space whatsoever, the amount of green space per person in Britain will still decline by 7.57% by 2040 due to population growth alone. “There is such high demand for development land that our parks and green spaces won’t be around for ever unless they are protected,” says Alison McCann, Policy Manager at Fields in Trust. “ArcGIS has given us a way to evidence the need to protect land and will help us save our parks and green spaces for future generations.”

Improved focus on areas of greatest need

As ArcGIS enables the green space data to be analysed, at a small geographic area, Fields in Trust can easily identify those areas of the country where interventions are most needed to help protect green spaces. For example, the 2020 Green Space Index showed that the East of England is likely to be hardest hit over the next five years with more than a 10% increase in the number of people who do not live within a ten-minute walk of a green space. “With this insight, we can focus our activities and proactively protect the green spaces where they are most needed,” McCann says.

More purposeful engagements with stakeholders

The use of ArcGIS web maps helps Fields in Trust to have more purposeful engagements with stakeholders, from local councils to national policy makers. “Being able to incorporate health indicators and other data into web maps along with our Green Space Index, and share these maps with stakeholders in a highly visual format, is incredibly powerful,” McCann says. “ArcGIS enables us to present our case in a much more compelling way.”

Successful media relations campaigns

Finally, Fields in Trust has enjoyed great success with its story maps, one of which helped to generate over 200 pieces of media coverage. “As story maps are interactive, people can explore the data themselves and see their own areas, and this makes the data more accessible,” McCann says. “Compared to a press release with a data table, a story map brings the story to life and sparks the interest of a larger number of people.”

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