



# **Monitor of Engagement with the Natural Environment The national survey on people and the natural environment**

Headline report 2018:

Analysis of latest results (March 2017 to  
February 2018) and nine years of the survey  
from 2009 to 2018

10<sup>th</sup> September 2018

For further information see:

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



# Foreword

Natural England produces a range of reports providing evidence and advice to assist us in delivering our duties.

Since 2009, Natural England has commissioned Kantar TNS to undertake the Monitor of Engagement with the Natural Environment (MENE) survey. The data enables Natural England, the Department of Food and Rural Affairs (Defra), partners and data users to:

- Understand how people use, enjoy and are motivated to protect the natural environment
- Monitor changes in use of the natural environment over time, at a range of different spatial scales and for key groups within the population
- Inform on-the-ground initiatives to help them link more closely to people's needs
- Evaluate the impact and effectiveness of related policy initiatives

## The MENE headline report

This report presents the headline findings for the ninth year of MENE fieldwork, from March 2017, with analysis of nine years of the survey data (from 2009 to 2018) as appropriate.

Further data for each of the headline areas featured in this report (see page 6) is available in the accompanying Excel file – [CLICK HERE](#).

Further details on the survey methods are available in the Technical Report – [CLICK HERE](#).

## National Statistics

The UK Statistics Authority has designated these statistics as National Statistics, in accordance with the Statistics and Registration Service Act 2007 and signifying compliance with the Code of Practice for Statistics and its key principles of:

- Value- statistics that support society's needs for information
- Quality - data and methods that produce assured statistics
- Trust – users of statistics and citizens have confidence in the people and organisations that produce statistics and data

Once statistics have been designated as National Statistics it is a statutory requirement that the Code of Practice shall continue to be observed. For further details see [www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/Code-of-Practice-for-Statistics.pdf](http://www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/Code-of-Practice-for-Statistics.pdf).

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# Introduction

This report summarises the headline findings from the ninth year of the Monitor of Engagement with the Natural Environment (MENE) survey, including comparisons with previous survey years.

## Background

In the nine years since the survey commenced, a wealth of evidence on outdoor recreation, pro-environmental behaviour, attitudes and engagement with the natural environment has been collected. MENE has provided a basis for specific analysis on areas such as how members of different societal groups and children engage with the outdoors. The data set also provides scope for deeper exploration in relation to areas such as well-being and the relationship between valuing the natural environment and actions taken to protect it. Natural England uses the data to monitor changes in people's experience of and attitudes towards nature over time and to provide advice to Defra to inform policy.

## Survey aims and objectives

This survey provides information about the relationship between people and the natural environment. Whilst the main focus is on visits to the natural environment, it also seeks to capture other ways of engaging with the natural environment such as time spent in the garden and watching nature programmes on television.

The objectives of the survey are to:

- Provide estimates of the number of visits to the natural environment by the adult population (16 years and over) residing in England.
- Measure the extent of participation in visits to the natural environment and identify the barriers and drivers that shape participation.
- Provide robust information on the characteristics of visitors and visits to the natural environment.
- Measure other ways of using and enjoying the natural environment.
- Identify patterns in use and participation for key groups within the population and at a range of spatial scales.

## Survey scope

Every year, we ask around 46,000 people from all over England about their experiences of and attitudes to about the natural environment. The survey has been running for nine years, making it the biggest survey of its kind and allowing us to track population level changes over time. Since 2009, 420,790 interviews have been conducted.

The survey relates to engagement with the natural environment. By natural environment we mean all green, blue and open spaces in and around towns and cities as well as the wider countryside and coastline.

The main focus of the survey is people's experiences of nature, including time spent on visits to the outdoors in the natural environment, away from home. By visits we mean discretionary time, ranging from a few minutes out of the home to an all day trip. Visits may include time spent close to home or further afield, potentially while on holiday in England. Routine shopping trips or time spent in a person's own garden are not included in the definition of a visit in MENE.

The survey also includes questions regarding engagement with the natural environment other than that experienced during visits. This includes activities such as time spent in private and communal gardens, watching nature programmes on television and undertaking pro-environmental activities such as recycling.

## MENE review

Natural England is working with Defra to review MENE, to ensure that the survey builds on what we have learnt so far and asks the right questions to help meet future evidence and policy needs. Regular review is a key requirement of the Code of Practice for Statistics and we welcome engagement with users to ensure MENE meets their needs. If you would like to contribute to this review please email [MENE@naturalengland.org.uk](mailto:MENE@naturalengland.org.uk).



## **A note on statistical significance**

Please note that any trends or variations between results highlighted in the text are statistically significant at the 95 percent Confidence Level unless stated otherwise. This means that differences between results – for example comparisons of two population groups – are unlikely to be the result of sampling error or chance.

## **Questionnaire change and calibration exercise**

Between year 7 (2015/16) and year 8 (2016/17) of MENE a change was made to questions which recorded the volume of visits taken by respondents, the place visited and activities undertaken, resulting in a loss in the comparability for these measures. As such an exercise was undertaken to allow for the affected results from years 8 and 9 of to be compared with those from previous years.

This change primarily impacted upon visit based results (i.e. volumes of visits and visit characteristics) while other respondent based results (e.g. proportions of population taking visits in last year) are not affected.

All of the year 8 and 9 visit based results in this report are adjusted using this calibration approach. See the Technical Report 2018 for full details.

## **Further publications from the survey**

This report forms one part of a larger family of outputs from the survey.

Published alongside this report are:

- A Technical Report providing full details of the survey methodology, sampling, grossing and weighting and estimates of confidence intervals.
- Data tables in Excel providing more detailed survey results (note links to this file in related report sections).
- SPSS, .CSV and Excel data files that allow detailed analysis of the MENE dataset.

Please see GOV.UK for further outputs from the survey:

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

**Further data for each of the headline areas featuring in this report is available in the accompanying Excel file – [CLICK HERE](#).**





# Headlines from the 2017/18 survey

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Further data for each of the headline areas is available in the accompanying Excel file [CLICK HERE](#)





# Headline results

# Summary of key statistics for 2017/18

Between March 2017 to February 2018 around three in five adults living in England (62%) reported taking visits to the natural environment at least once a week. 38% 'strongly agreed' that spending time out of doors was an important part of their life (a further 49% 'agreed').

In terms of environmental protection, 32% 'strongly agreed' with the statement 'I am concerned about damage to the natural environment'; a further 54% 'agreed'. Overall 89% had undertaken at least one pro-environmental behaviour such as recycling or choosing to walk or cycle instead of drive.

As shown in Figure 1 there were variations between different groups of society. For example, while younger people tended to visit more often than the oldest age groups, caring for the natural environment and undertaking certain pro-environmental activities tended to increase with age.

Frequency of visit taking amongst Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) population groups and residents of the most deprived areas were also lower than the total population average and the profile of visits taken by these groups varied from the average.

FIGURE 1 Summary of key 2017/18 MENE findings by demographic groups

	Total adult population England	Aged 16-24	Aged 65+	Black and minority ethnic (BAME)	Most deprived (bottom 10% IMD)
<b>Population size</b> (adults, England. Source ONS)	44.9m	7.2m	10.0m*	5.5m	4.1m
<b>% live in urban areas</b>	81%	87%	75%	95%	98%
<b>% visit at least weekly</b>	62%	64%	57%	46%	52%
<b>% visit less than monthly</b>	18%	13%	27%	26%	23%
<b>Average visits per person per week</b>	1.7	1.3	1.5	0.9	1.2
<b>% "Spending time out of doors is an important part of my life."</b> (strongly agree)	38%	24%	42%	32%	24%
<b>% "I am concerned about damage to the natural environment."</b> (strongly agree)	32%	27%	33%	31%	27%
<b>% undertaken any pro-environmental behaviours</b>	89%	84%	90%	76%	81%



# 1.

## More people are frequently visiting nature than ever before, an upward trend that holds across different sectors of the population.

There has been a significant increase in the proportion of adults taking visits at least once a week, from 54% in 2009/10 to 62% in 2017/18 (Figure 2).

Most of this increase has been driven by occasional visitors (i.e. those taking visits at least once a month but less than weekly) visiting more frequently while the proportion of the population never taking visits has stayed at a similar level over the period (dotted line in Figure 2).

The increase in the proportion of people taking visits at least once a week is seen across population groups, including groups where levels of participation tend to be lowest (see Figure 5 overleaf). Most notably the proportion of people living in most deprived areas who had taken visits increased by 13 percentage points from 38% in 2009/10 to 51% in 2017/18.

MENE suggests that visits are increasingly taken through urban locations, on journeys to places (see page 18). These changes reflect other indicators, for example Sport England's Active Lives survey shows a significant increase in the volume of the population walking for travel between 2015 and 2017<sup>1</sup>.

FIGURE 2 Frequency of visits (% of adults, 2009/10 to 2017/18)

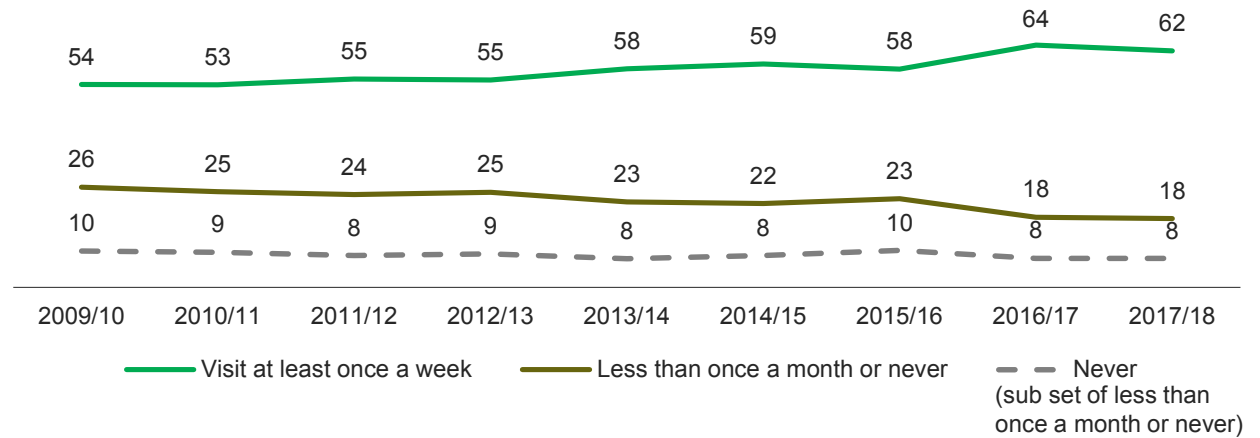
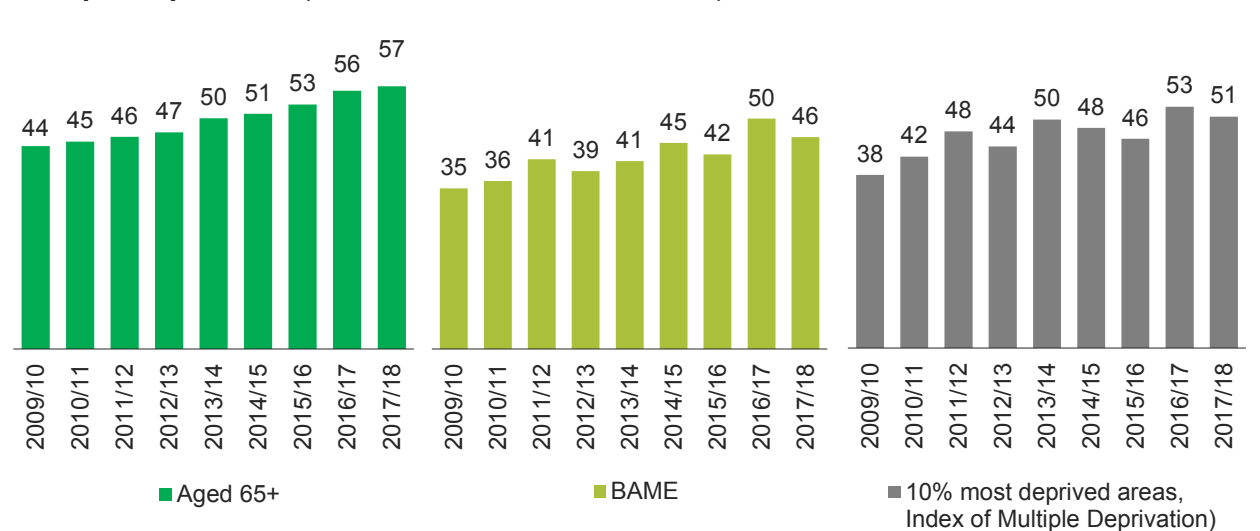


FIGURE 3 Frequency of visits (at least once a week) by age, ethnicity and Index of Multiple Deprivation (% of adults 2009/10 to 2017/18)



## 2.

**During 2017/18, two thirds of adults spent time in nature at least once a week but the frequency of visits varied significantly between population groups.**

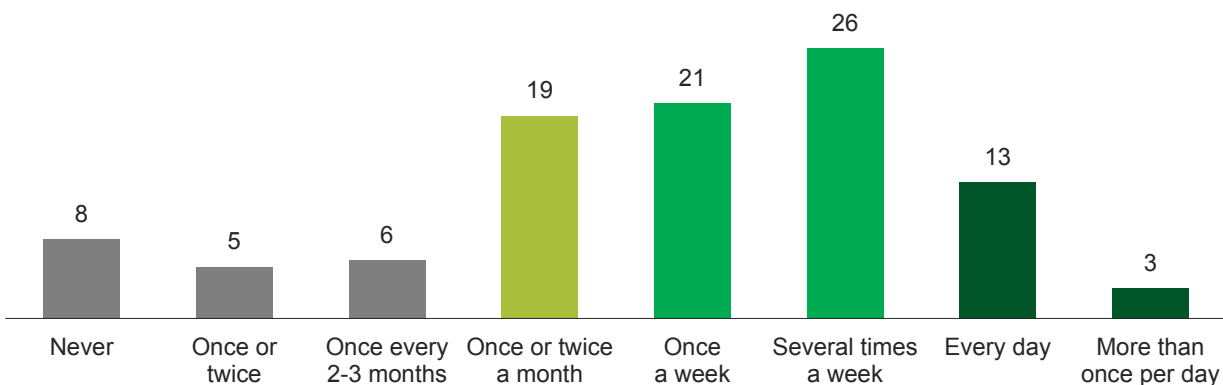
During the 12 months from March 2017 to February 2018, nearly two thirds of adults living in England visited the natural environment at least once a week (62%, see Figure 4). A significant proportion took visits less than once a month or never took visits (18%).

Frequency of visit taking varied between population groups (Figure 5) with larger variations by age, ethnicity and socio-economic status (measured using Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD)) than for other demographics (analysis included a wider range of variables, not shown).

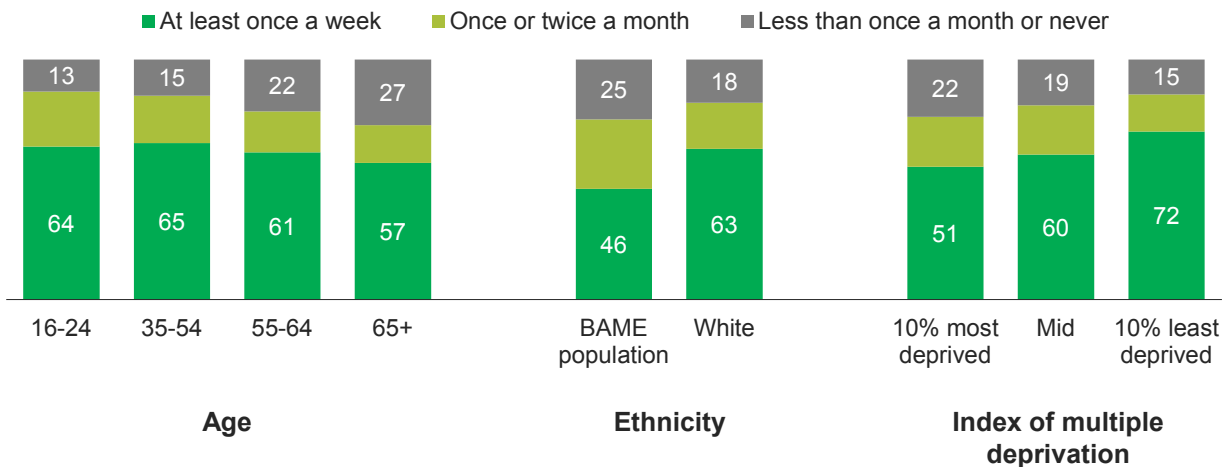
Younger people (age 16-24) were the most frequent visitors, compared to other age groups. The least frequent visitors included those aged 65 and over, members of the BAME population and residents living in the most deprived areas of England.

This differentiation between population groups is supported by other studies which show that there is strong evidence of unequal distribution of environmental benefits and burdens across different parts of society in England<sup>2</sup>. This has been associated with differential provision, access and quality of greenspace<sup>3,4</sup>, as well as maintenance and safety concerns<sup>5</sup>. The government's 25 Year Environment Plan<sup>12</sup> recognises this and aims to ensure an equal distribution of environmental benefits, resources and opportunities.

**FIGURE 4 Frequency of visits**  
(% adult population – 2017/18)



**FIGURE 5 Frequency of visits by age, ethnicity and IMD**  
(% of adults in each group – 2017/18)



### 3.

#### In 2017/18 health and exercise was the main motivation for spending time in the natural environment, reported for half of all visits.

People’s reasons for spending time in nature varied (Figure 6). In 2017/18 health and exercise was the most frequently reported reason – the importance of this motivation has increased over time\*, reported for 34% of visits in 2009/10, rising to 50% in 2017/18.

Half (49%) of visits were taken to natural places within a town or city (Figure 7) while 39% were taken to the countryside and 12% to a beach or other coastal location. Parks in towns and cities were the most popular destination type overall, a trend that is increasing over time. Visits to this type of place have grown over the course of the MENE survey<sup>4</sup>.

MENE also asks people to report how they felt about the outcomes of their visit (Figure 8). This shows that people ‘feel close to nature’ in the majority of visits (74%) and report other feelings associated with positive wellbeing.

While urban destinations are the most popular, an understanding of people’s visit outcomes shows the importance of enabling more people to visit the countryside and the coast, as reported enjoyment and other aspects associated with positive wellbeing outcomes tend to be higher for these destinations.

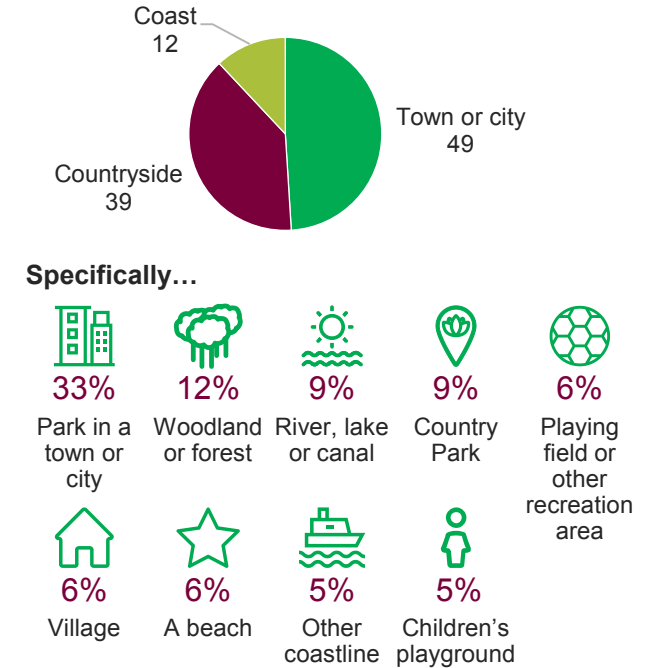
\* Due to changes in the questionnaire from 2016, caution should be taken when comparing visit profile and visit volume results across these periods. See page 4 for more information and full details in Technical Report.

FIGURE 6 Top 5 motivations for visits to the natural environment (% of visits taken 2017/18)



Note that respondents can select more than one motivation so the sum of all responses totals more than 100%

FIGURE 7 Places visited (% of visits taken 2017/18)



Note that respondents can select more than one place so the sum of all responses totals more than 100%

FIGURE 8 Visit outcomes, Agree and Strongly agree (% of visits taken 2017/18)



On average positive outcomes strongest when visits to coast, weakest when to places in towns and cities.



# 4.

## There are significant differences in how and why different population groups engage with nature but most visit takers report high levels of enjoyment.

MENE analysis shows that older people, people from the BAME population and those living in the most deprived areas of England are less likely to spend time in nature than the total population.

However, the large majority (c.75% or more) of people in all these groups do report spending time in nature at least once a month (Figure 1). Figure 9 illustrates some of the most significant differences in relation to the profile of visits they take, compared with the total population.

The profile of a visit – where people go and why – changes with age. Compared to the population average, younger age groups are more likely to take visits to socialise with friends; families more often take visits to entertain children; while people aged 65 and over are more likely to take visits to enjoy wildlife and scenery and for health and exercise.

Members of the BAME population are more likely to visit parks in towns and cities, often with a greater desire to spend time with family and friends and to learn about the outdoors. This may be in some part because the BAME sample in MENE is younger than the population as a whole, less likely to live in rural or affluent areas and have lower levels of dog ownership.

Those living in England's most deprived areas are more likely to take visits to urban locations such as parks and for activities to related to children. This group is also more likely to report benefits relating to calm and relaxation.

FIGURE 9 Visit characteristics by demographic groups  
Key differences from the total population profile 2017/18

	Aged 16-24	Aged 65+	Black and Minority Ethnic (BAME)	Most deprived (bottom 10% IMD)
<b>Motivations</b>	To spend time with friends	Health or exercise To be somewhere I like To enjoy wildlife	To entertain children To spend time with family or friends To learn something about the outdoors	To entertain children To spend time with family or friends
<b>Places visited</b>	Park in a town or city A beach	Village Coastline Allotment or community garden	Children's playground Park in town or city	Children's playground Park in town or city Another open space in town
<b>Visit outcomes</b>	No significant differences from total population profile	I took time to appreciate my surroundings	I felt close to nature I felt refreshed and revitalised I learned something new about the natural world	It made me feel calm and relaxed

# 5.

## In 2017/18 reasons for not spending more time outdoors were wide ranging and varied by age, affluence and ethnicity.

In 2017/18, lack of time and poor health were the main reasons for not spending more time outdoors.

MENE asks people who report taking visits less than once a month why they have not spent more time out of doors. The reasons given are shown in Figure 11.

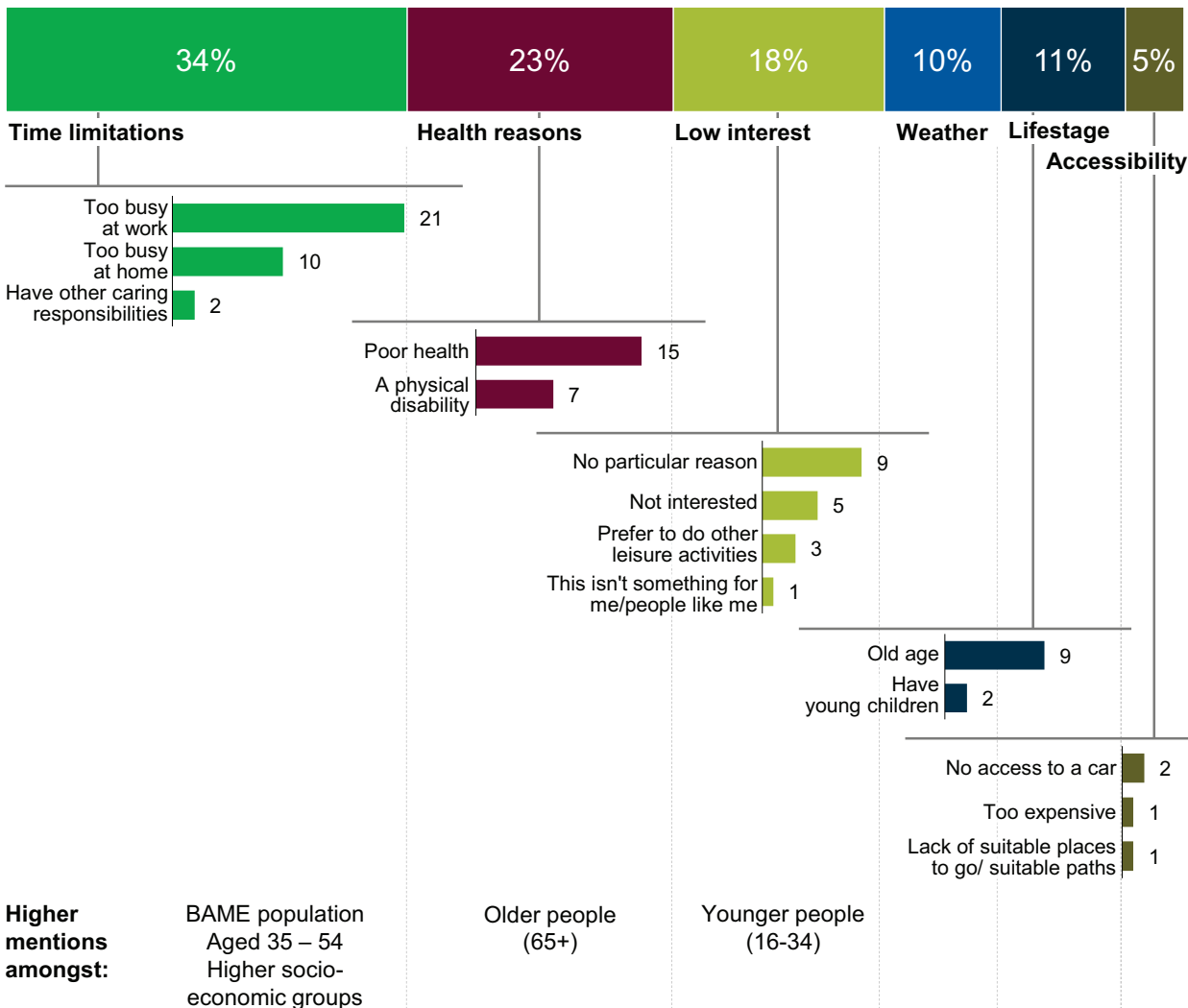
Reasons vary between demographic groups with those people of working age, in higher socio-economic and BAME groups most likely to state that being too busy at work or at home limited their time to take visits.

Poor health or physical disabilities were more likely to be reasons given by older age groups.

Attitudinal reasons (not interested, 'no particular reason' or a preference for other activities) were more prevalent amongst the youngest age group.

These results build on analysis of 2009-2016 survey data<sup>6</sup> which showed that infrequent users were more likely to be: female, older, in poor health, of lower socioeconomic status, in the BAME population, live in relatively deprived areas with less neighbourhood greenspace and be further from the coast.

FIGURE 11 Reasons for not taking visits more often (% of barriers mentioned by adults visiting less than once a month, 2017/18)



Note that percentages in charts do not sum to 100% due to rounding effects or as some of the categories include other less frequently provided reasons not shown in chart.

# 6.

## The reasons given for not spending more time in nature are changing, with poor health becoming more prominent.

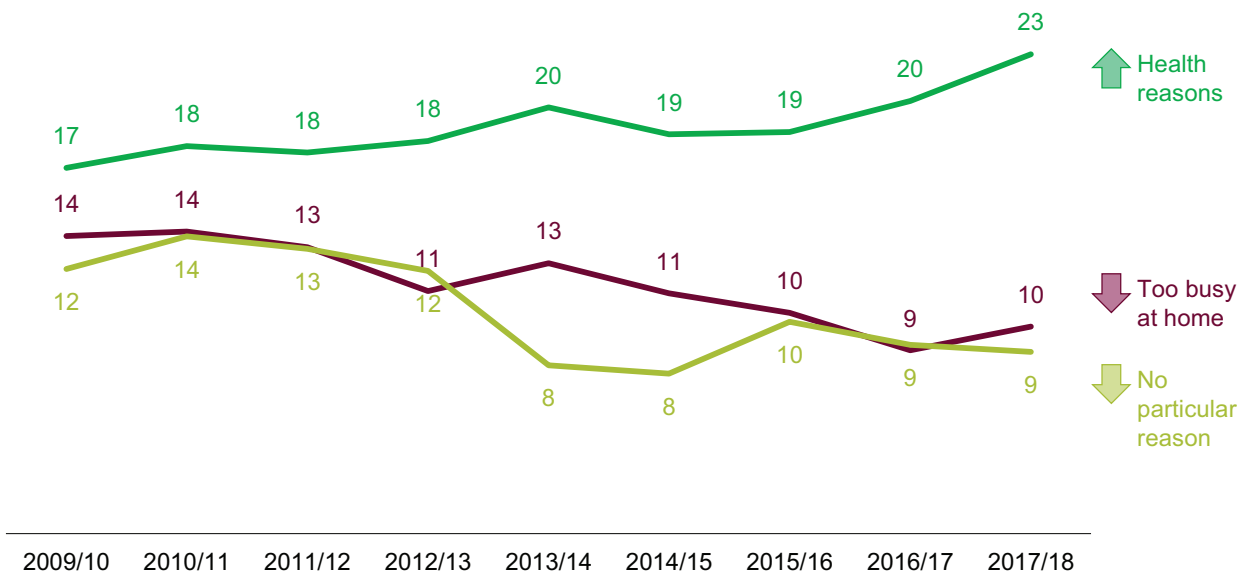
MENE asks people who report taking visits less than once a month to state why they have not spent more time out of doors. Figure 10 illustrates reasons provided where there has been a statistically significant change between 2009/10 and 2017/18.

Notably the proportions who don't take visits due to being 'too busy at home' or for 'no particular reason' declined while the proportion reporting any poor health reasons increased.

ONS data (2018)<sup>13</sup> suggests that there has been no overall long term change in the percentage of people who were mostly or completely satisfied with their health.

We could therefore hypothesize that as the share of the population who rarely or never take visits has decreased (see 'less than once a month or never' trendline in Figure 2), those who remain in this group are increasingly likely to be in this group due to health reasons. Conversely, other reasons such as lack of time or interest have become less prevalent amongst those who rarely or never take visits, suggesting that some of those who previously cited these barriers have started to take visits more often.

FIGURE 10 Key trends in barriers to visit taking (% of barriers mentioned by adults visiting less than once a month, 2017/18)





# 7.

## Having open green space close to home is important to 93% of people but perceptions have become less positive in recent years.

In 2017/18 the vast majority of the population (93%) agreed with the statement ‘having open green spaces close to where I live is important’. This proportion has remained consistently high over the last nine years, though the proportion who strongly agree has declined

Since 2013 MENE respondents have also rated their local greenspaces on the basis of their accessibility and quality (Figure 13). While the vast majority of the population provide positive responses, suggesting general satisfaction, it is notable that only around a third or less strongly agreed with each of the statements and these proportions have declined.

These findings are supported by other research which shows that, while public use of parks is on the rise, pressure on public finances is making them much harder to properly manage, maintain and safeguard, and with fewer park managers reporting improvements<sup>7</sup>. The Government has established a Parks Action Group to help England’s public parks and green spaces meet the needs of communities now and in the future<sup>14</sup>.

FIGURE 12 Importance of local green spaces – Agree and Strongly Agree responses (see accompanying Excel for full range of responses provided) (% of adults, 2009/10 to 2017/18)

*“Having open green spaces close to where I live is important”*

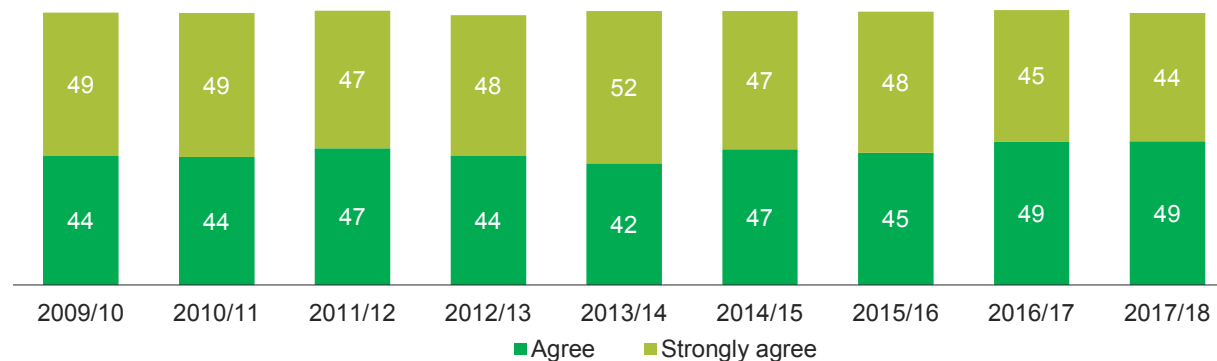
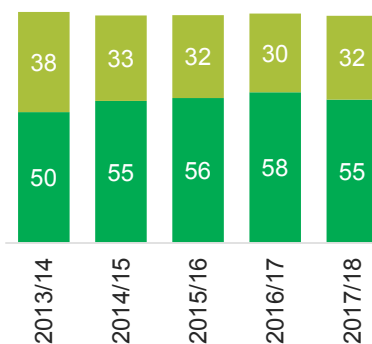


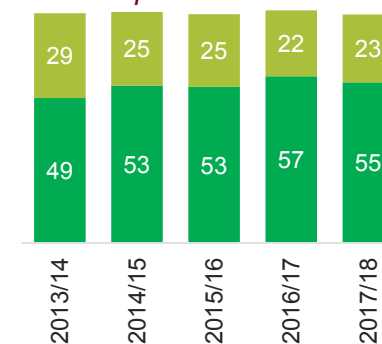
FIGURE 13 Perceptions of local green spaces – Agree and Strongly Agree responses (see accompanying Excel for full range of responses provided) (% of adults, 2013/14 to 2017/18)

*My local greenspaces are...*

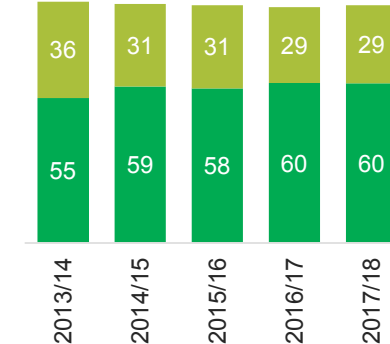
*...within easy walking distance*



*...of a high enough standard to want to spend time there*



*...easy to get into and around*



Agree Strongly agree

# 8.

## Gardens are valued places to relax, enjoy privacy and, for many, to enjoy and encourage wildlife.

As shown in Figure 14, most of the adult population in England (89%) have access to either a private garden, a shared private garden or another private outdoor space.

In 2017/18, around half of respondents said that they enjoyed spending time in their garden or that it is important to them (Figure 15), conversely, this suggests that many people with gardens do not value them as highly.

Figure 16 shows the main reasons people reported enjoying their garden. The most important of these are privacy and providing a place to enjoy plants, gardening and wildlife. In 2017/18, just over a third of people said that they enjoyed feeding birds or encouraging other wildlife (a similar result was obtained in previous years).

In terms of activities undertaken in gardens (Figure 17), while the proportion of adults who regularly relax in the garden has remained at fairly consistent levels since 2009/10, there has been a notable decrease in the proportion who take part in gardening, dropping from 55% in 2009/10 to 48% in 2017/18.

FIGURE 14 Access to a garden (% of adults, 2017/18)

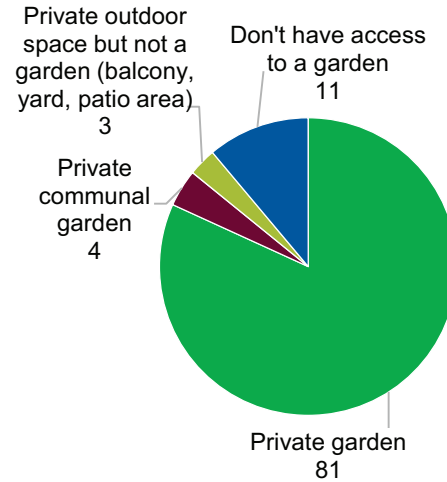


FIGURE 15 Attitudes to garden (% of adults with a garden, 2017/18)

*I like spending time in my garden* 57%  
*My garden is an important place to me* 47%

FIGURE 16 Top ten reasons people enjoy their gardens (% of adults with a garden, 2017/18)

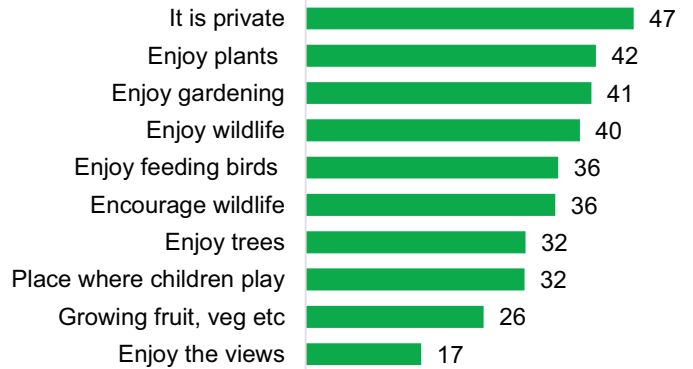
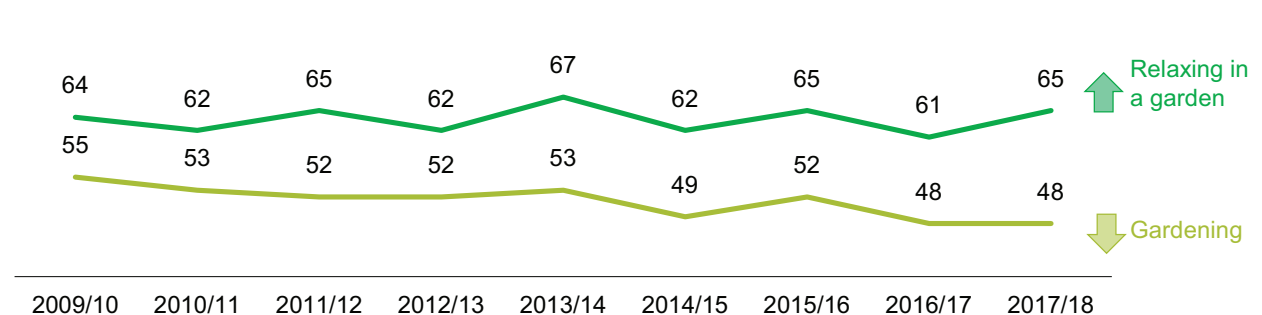


FIGURE 17 Activities undertaken in garden (% of adults, 2009/10 to 2017/18)



# 9.

## In 2017/18, 86% of people were concerned about damage to the natural environment.

As shown in Figure 18, 86% of the population are concerned about damage to the natural environment, 94% recognise the importance of natural places and 87% see spending time outdoors as an important part of their life.

Most of the population expect a reduction in biodiversity during the next 50 years (72% expect a reduction globally, 66% expect a reduction in England). Amongst those adults who are aware of biodiversity decline, 75% expressed concern.

While general levels of concern and the importance of the outdoors are high across all age groups, it is notable that levels of strong agreement tend to be lower amongst younger age groups but increasing with growing age (Figure 19).

Also, while overall agreement with the statements has been fairly consistent for nine years, levels of strong agreement have decreased. Figure 20 illustrates this decrease in relation to strong concern about damage to the natural environment from 36% in 2009/10 to a low of 32% in 2017/18.

This apparent 'softening' in concern may be related to the rise of a number of other issues which are increasingly 'dominating' the minds of the population. For example, Ipsos-Mori's Issues Index 2018<sup>8</sup> shows that over the last decade while concern for pollution/environment has generally been constant, concern for other issues such as the NHS and Brexit increased significantly.

FIGURE 18 Attitudes towards the natural environment and biodiversity (% of adults 2017/18)

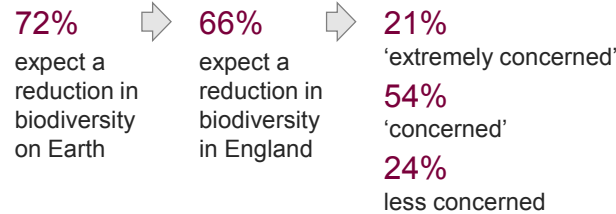
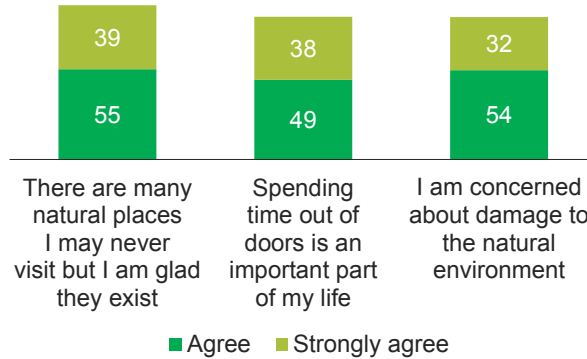
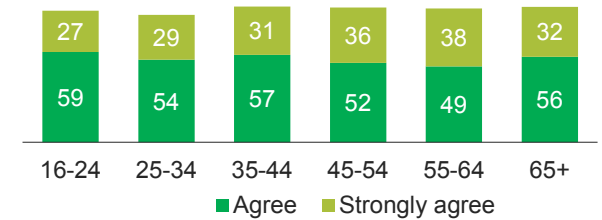


FIGURE 19 Attitudes by age (agree/strongly agree) (% of adults 2017/18)

*"I am concerned about damage to the natural environment."*



*"Spending time out of doors is an important part of my life."*

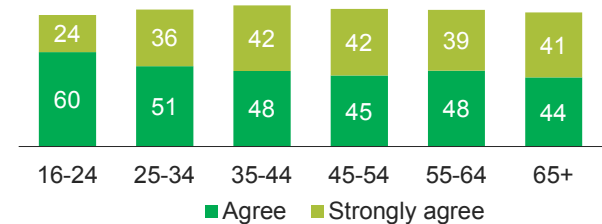
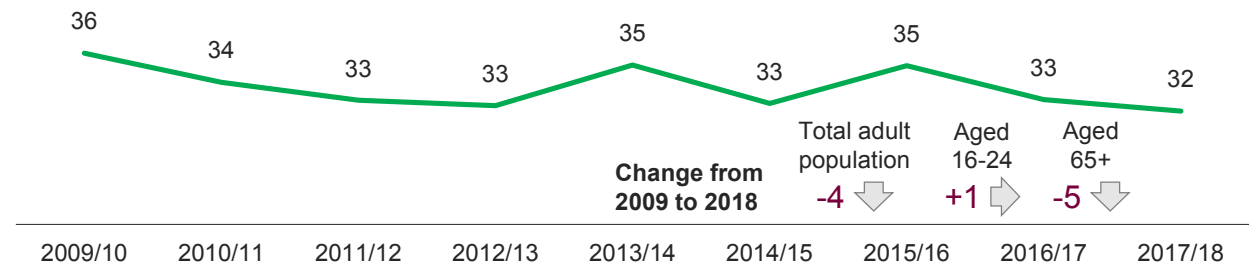


FIGURE 20 "I am concerned about damage to the natural environment" (strongly agree) (% of adults 2009/10 to 2017/18)





# 10.

## Choosing to walk instead of taking the car is increasing, but other pro-environmental behaviours remain static.

MENE asks people about whether they participate in pro-environmental behaviours and activities involving the natural environment.

### Travelling (Figure 21)

The proportion of the population choosing to walk through greenspace on a journey and/or actively choosing to walk or cycle instead of driving has increased between 2009 and 2018, both up eight percentage points. This trend may in part be related to a general reduction in car usage<sup>11</sup>. The reason for the reduction in 2016/17 is not clear.

### At home (Figure 22)

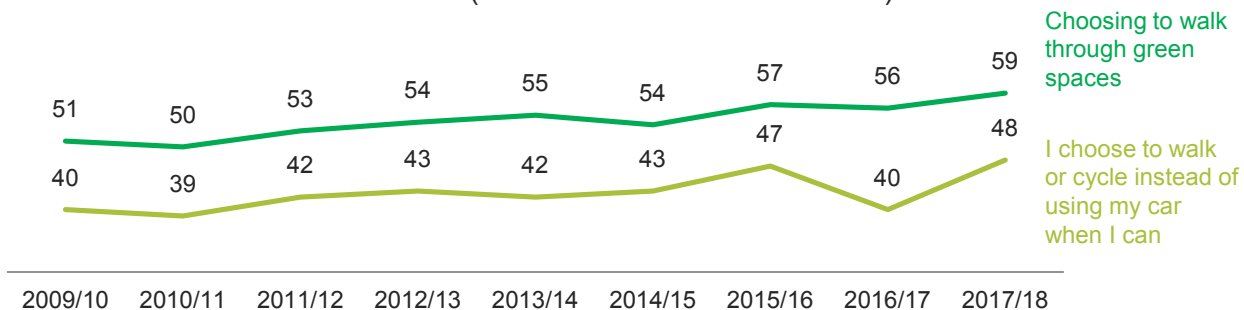
Just over three quarters of the population (77%) recycle on a regular basis. Smaller proportions choose to buy seasonal or locally grown food or eco-friendly products. Notably these proportions have not changed significantly since 2009/10.

### Taking action (Figure 23)

A minority of people report participation in social actions such as donating time or money to environmental causes or encouraging other people to protect the environment. Participation in these activities have also remained at similar levels over the last 9 years.

### Travelling

FIGURE 21 Activities undertaken (% of adults 2009/10 to 2017/18)



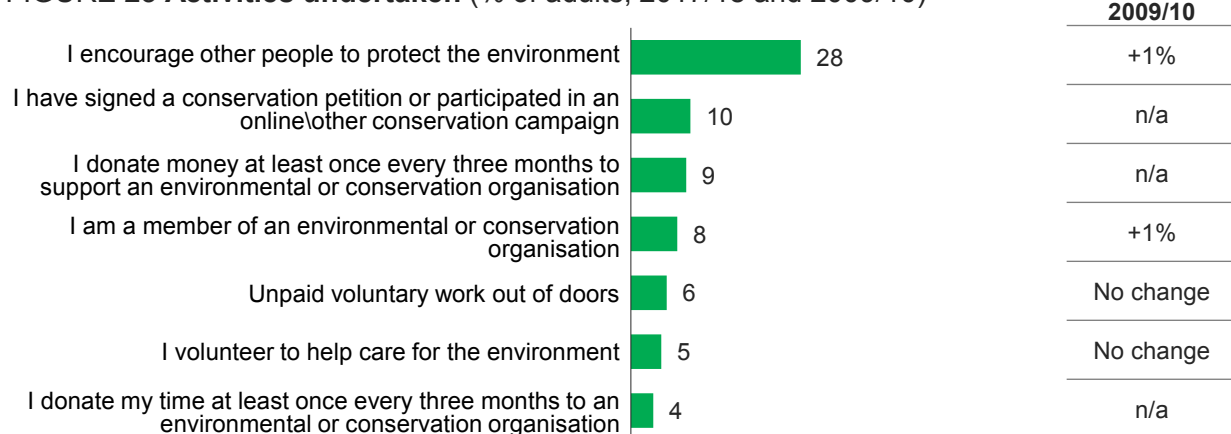
### At home

FIGURE 22 Activities undertaken (% of adults, 2017/18 and 2009/10)



### Taking action

FIGURE 23 Activities undertaken (% of adults, 2017/18 and 2009/10)



\*Actions marked n/a added in later years

# 11.

## A third of people think they are likely to make lifestyle changes to protect the environment.

When asked the questions shown in Figure 24, overall around a third of the population either intend to make changes to their lifestyle to protect the environment (17%) or would like to make changes but have not done so, due to barriers such as a lack of knowledge and other difficulties (17%).

However a similar proportion (33%) state that they are happy with their lifestyle and don't plan to make changes.

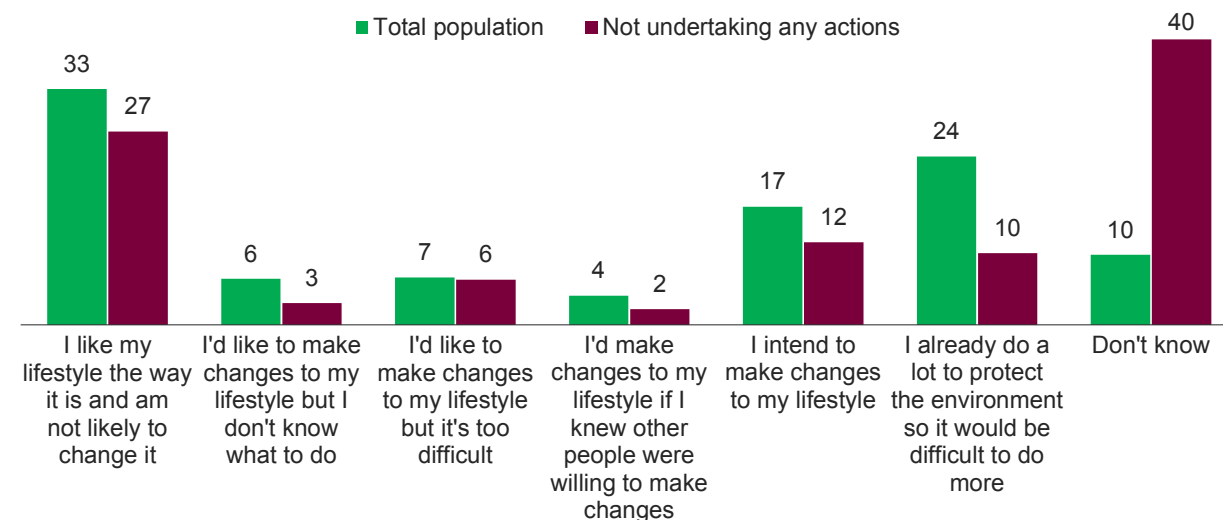
Over the last nine years, the proportion of people stating that they like their lifestyle the way it is and are not likely to change it has increased from 26% to 33%.

Most of the remainder (24%) feel that they do a lot and could not do more to help the environment.

Nine percent of the population reported that they undertake none of the pro-environmental activities shown in Figures 24 and 25. Of these, a notably high proportion provided a 'Don't Know' response to this attitudinal question suggesting a potential lack of engagement, knowledge or relevance to members of the group.

FIGURE 24 Attitudes to changing lifestyle amongst total population and those who undertake no pro-environmental activities (% of adults 2017/18)

*Please think about whether or not you are likely to make changes to your lifestyle to protect the environment, for example by recycling rather than throwing things away, using your car less and buying local food. Which of these statements best describes your intentions?*



	2017/18	Change from year 2009/10
I like my lifestyle the way it is and am not likely to change it	33%	+7%
I'd like to make changed but don't know how/it's too difficult/need other people to	17%	-3%
I intend to make changes to my lifestyle	17%	-2%
I already do a lot to protect the environment so it would be difficult to do more	24%	-2%
Don't know	10%	-1%





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