

# Tailoring Engagement with Urban Nature for University Students

*Tailoring engagement with urban nature for University of Sheffield students' wellbeing*

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*“...In this extensive habitation, Nature dwells in her loveliest garb. Here is to be found the antidote to the poison of town life...”*

On the opening of Ecclesall Woods to the public,  
Yorkshire Telegraph and Star, 23rd August 1928



*“thinking about the last 12 months, how often, on average, have you spent your leisure time out of doors, away from your home?”* Natural England’s Monitor of Engagement with the Natural Environment (MENE)  
Infrequent visitors aged 16-34 years old had significantly higher odds of responding ‘no particularly reason’ compare to all other ages.

*My best friend is scared of butterflies.*

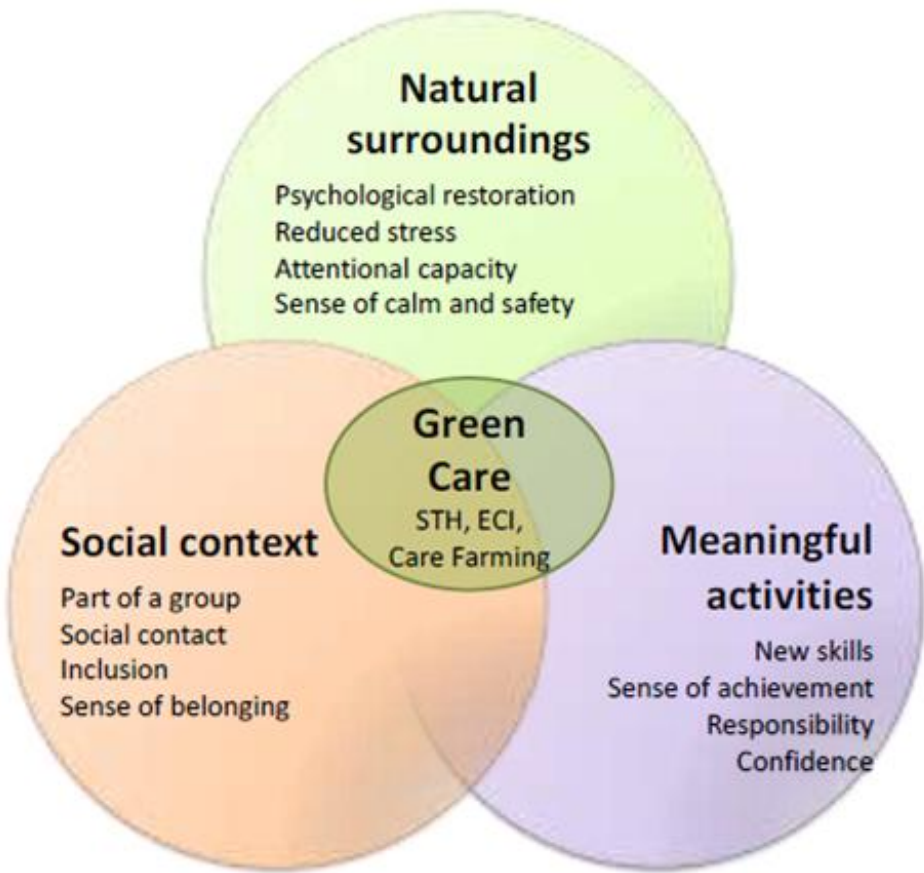


# Aim

- With increasing evidence on the benefit of **green prescriptions**, this PhD aims to understand more about engaging with the natural environment and how these interventions could be designed for **university students**.



# Green Prescriptions



Notes: STH – Social and Therapeutic Horticulture; ECI – Environmental Conservation Interventions;

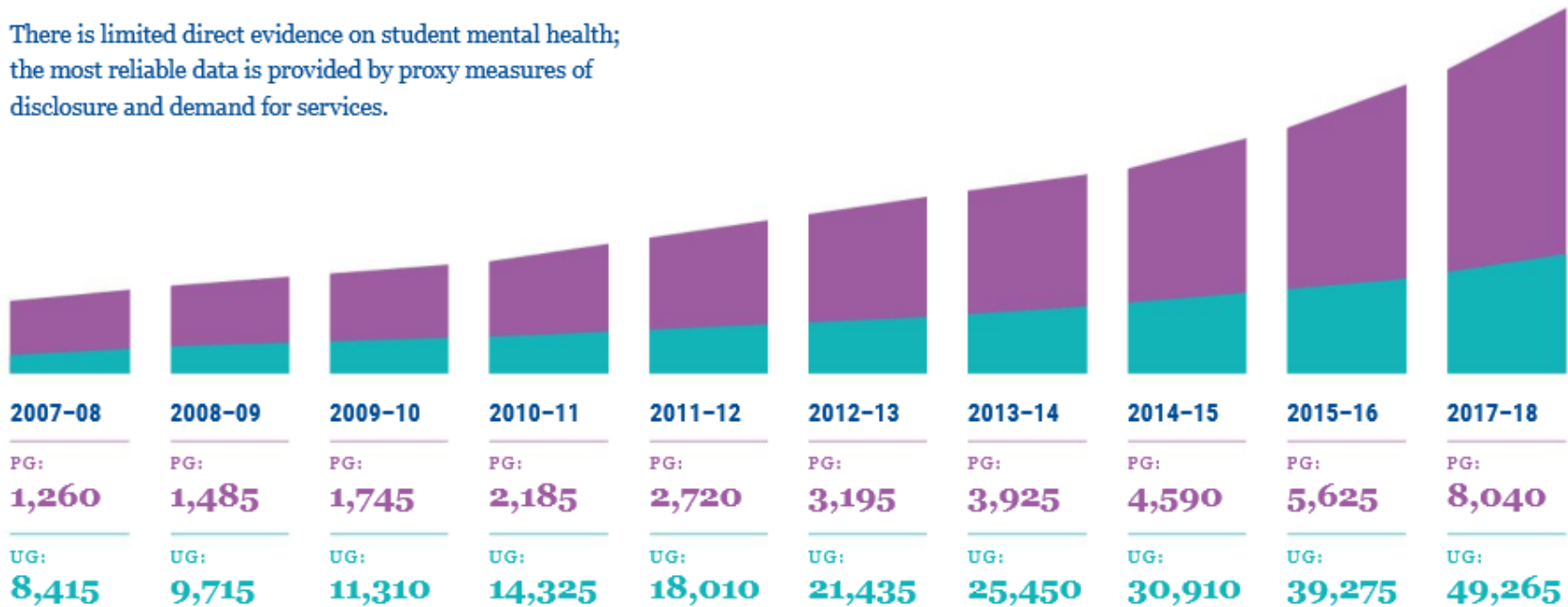
Source Bragg 1014, Bragg and Atkins 2016



# STUDENT MENTAL HEALTH

The 2.3 million students studying at UK universities are an important mental health population, with distinctive characteristics and vulnerabilities.

There is limited direct evidence on student mental health; the most reliable data is provided by proxy measures of disclosure and demand for services.



The number of students disclosing a mental health condition to their higher education institution is increasing

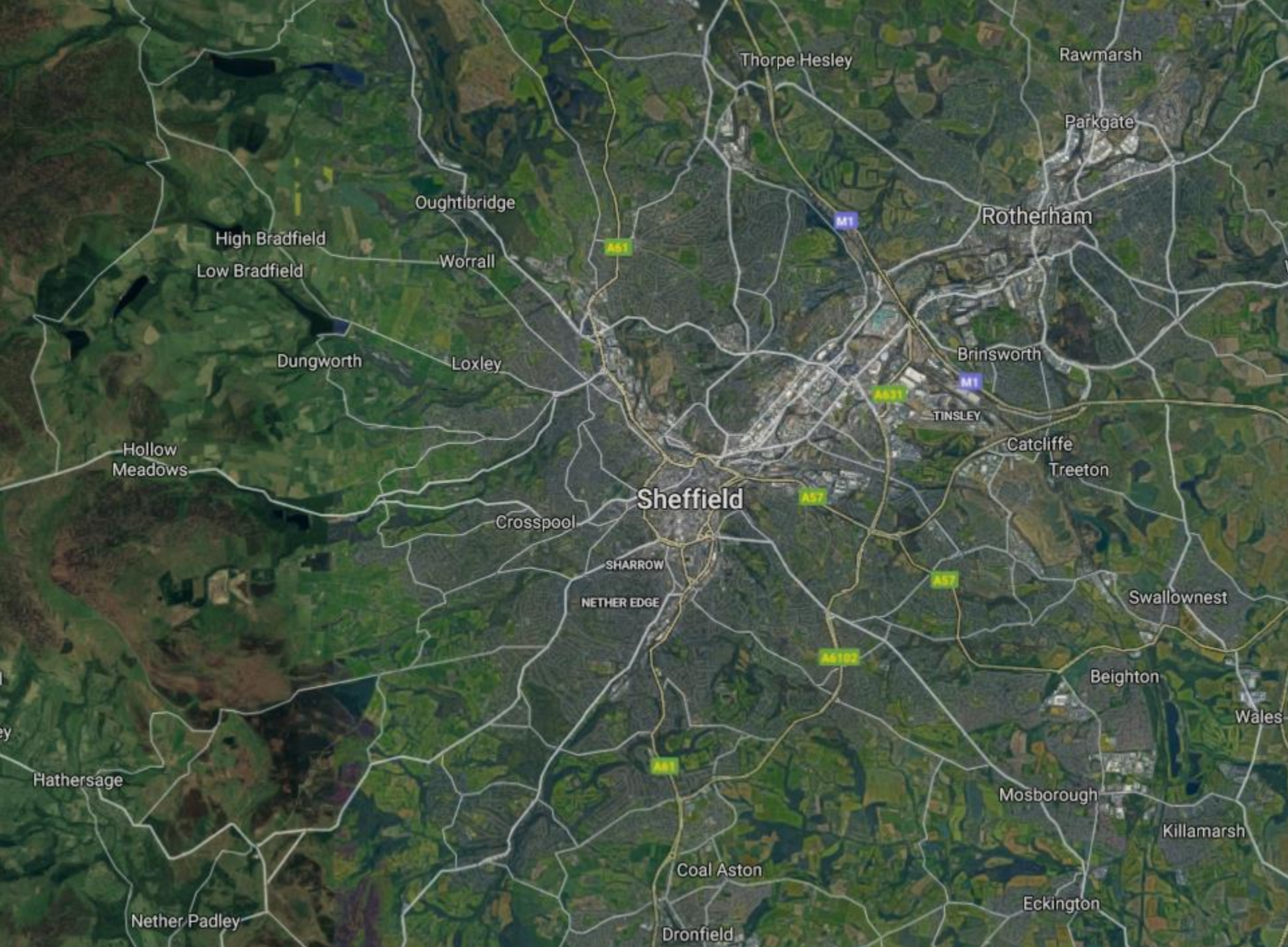
POSTGRADUATE    UNDERGRADUATE



# Sheffield

- South Yorkshire
- Population: 575,400
- Estimated to contain 4.5 million trees





# University of Sheffield



- Founded in 1905
- Student Population: 28,849
- 8,00 Staff
- Student Mental Health Strategy 2017-2020

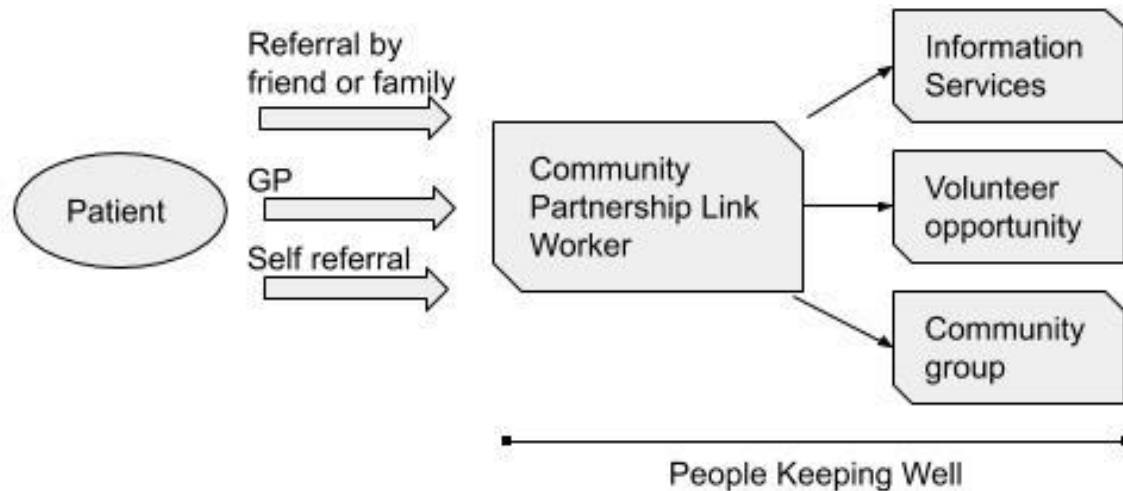




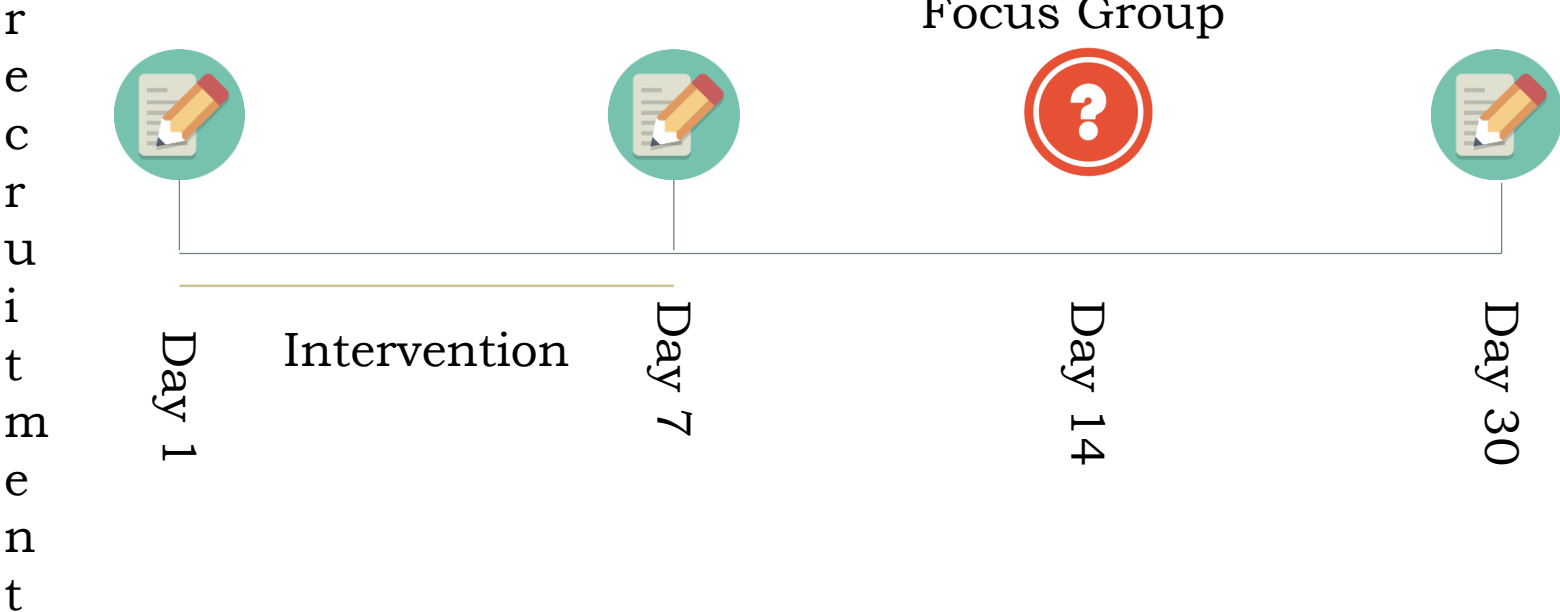


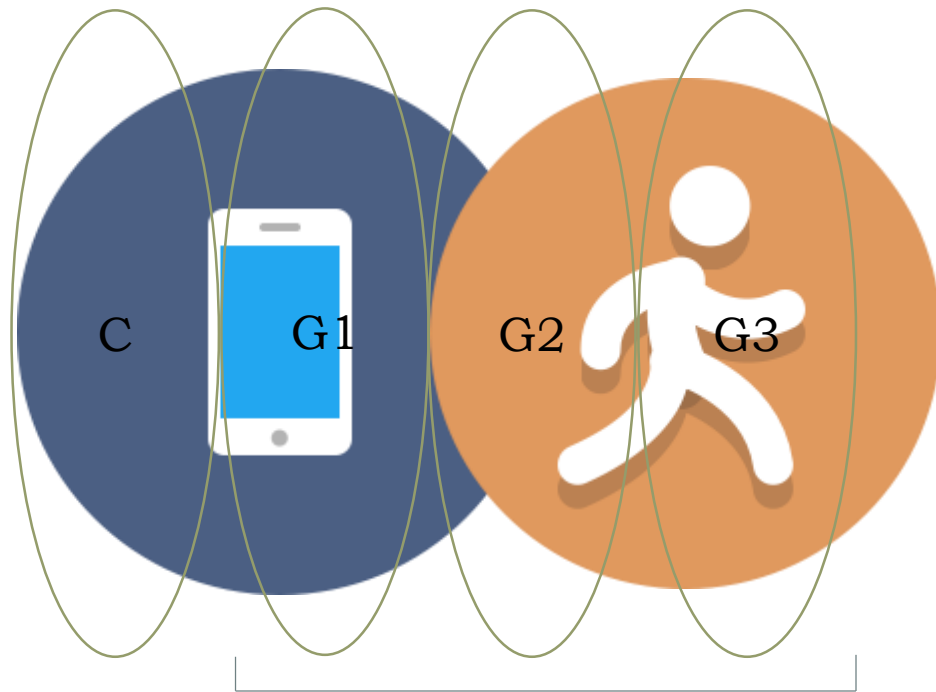
# Social prescribing in Sheffield

- People Keeping Well
- Partnership working
- Community lead interventions



# Methodology Intervention Study





Interaction with researcher

## Conditions

G1 - App

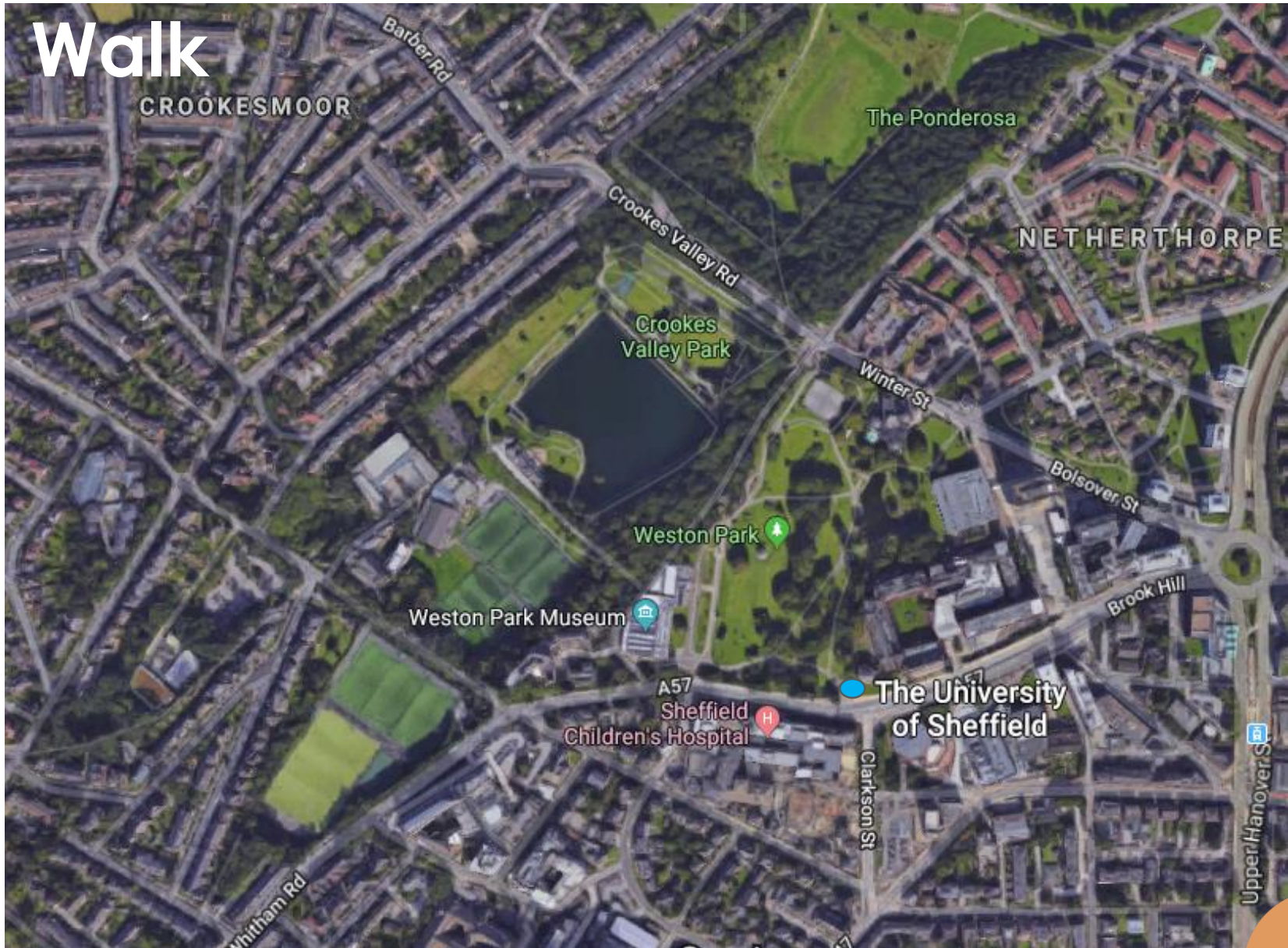
G2 - App and Walk

G3 - Walk

C - Data from IWUN

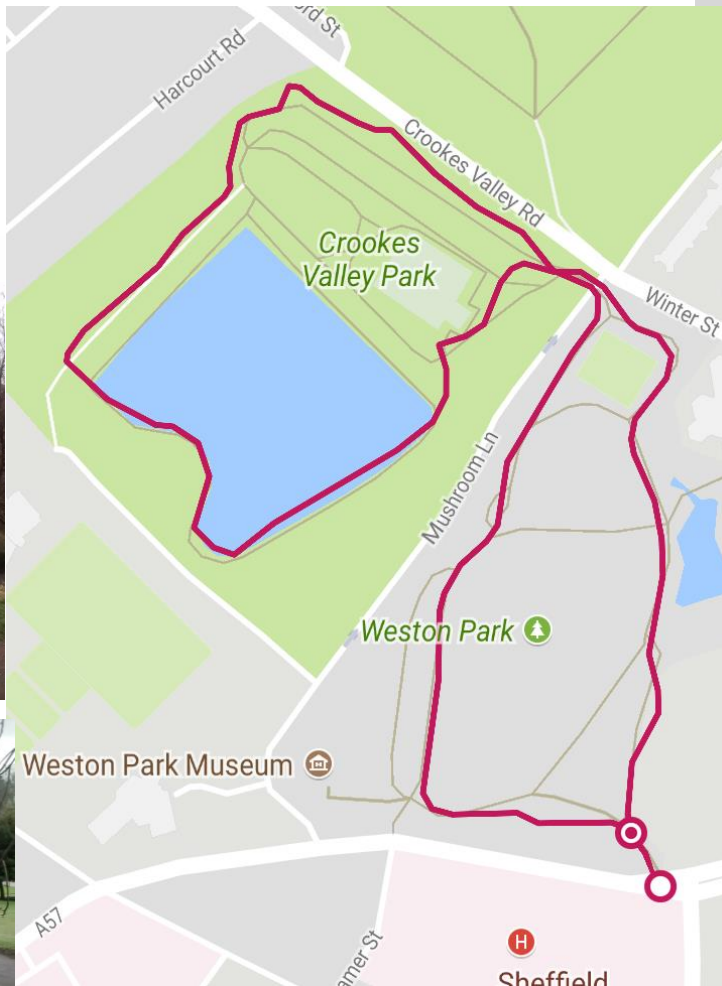


# Walk





# Walk



20-30mins circular route around Weston Park and Crookes Valley

Verbal cues

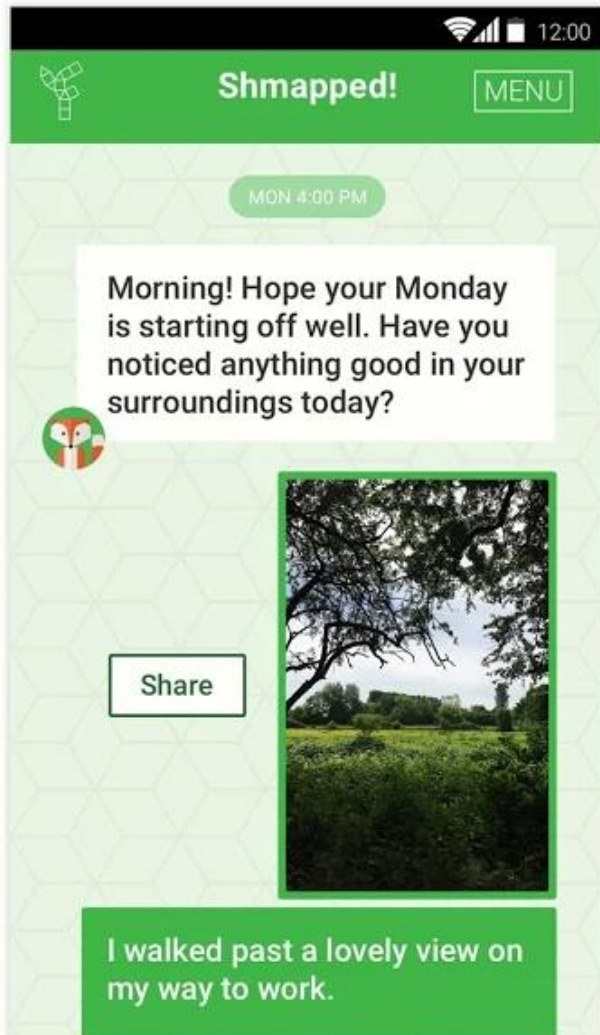
Notice Nature

Beginning of the week:  
**Group walk** with researcher

End of the week:  
**Personal walk** without researcher



Tell Shmapbot, our helpful companion,  
about the good things around you.



THU 12:48PM

Afternoon! I'm Shmapbot. Nice to meet you!



I'm helping the Universities of Derby and Sheffield to conduct a study mapping the good things about where you live.

We hope the results will inform how urban spaces are designed for better wellbeing of residents - wouldn't that be great?

# App

**Specially designed to remind you to notice  
your surroundings.  
Built on Nature condition**



# Measurements

- Recovering Quality of Life (ReQoL)
- Nature Relatedness (NR-6)
- Inclusion of Nature in Self (INS)



Do you live in Sheffield?  
Aged 18-25?



£20 voucher for study participation



This research is about wellbeing and the urban environment. By taking part you will contribute to improving our understanding of how we can use urban green spaces to boost wellbeing.

You'll be asked to participate in a 7-day intervention which will take up no more than 1 hour of your time in total and attend a short follow-up focus group.

To take part or for further information, please contact:

**Francesca Boyd** - [fboyd1@sheffield.ac.uk](mailto:fboyd1@sheffield.ac.uk)

**PhD Student – Department of Landscape**

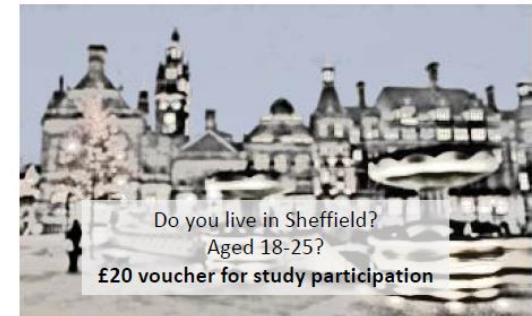
Supervised by Anna Jorgensen and Miles Richardson

The research has been approved by the University of Sheffield Department of Landscape's Research Ethics Committee.

## Urban Wellbeing



## Urban Wellbeing



# Recruitment





# 63,939 STEPS

Each group initial contained 30 participants, totalling 90.

69 participants completed the baseline-questions.

52 completed all three time point measurements.



Data removed for  
publication please contact  
author if you would like  
the statistical findings.



# Focus Groups





What have you  
#Shmapped today?

F (researcher): so you said you focus now on your tulips now, so are they blooming nicely?

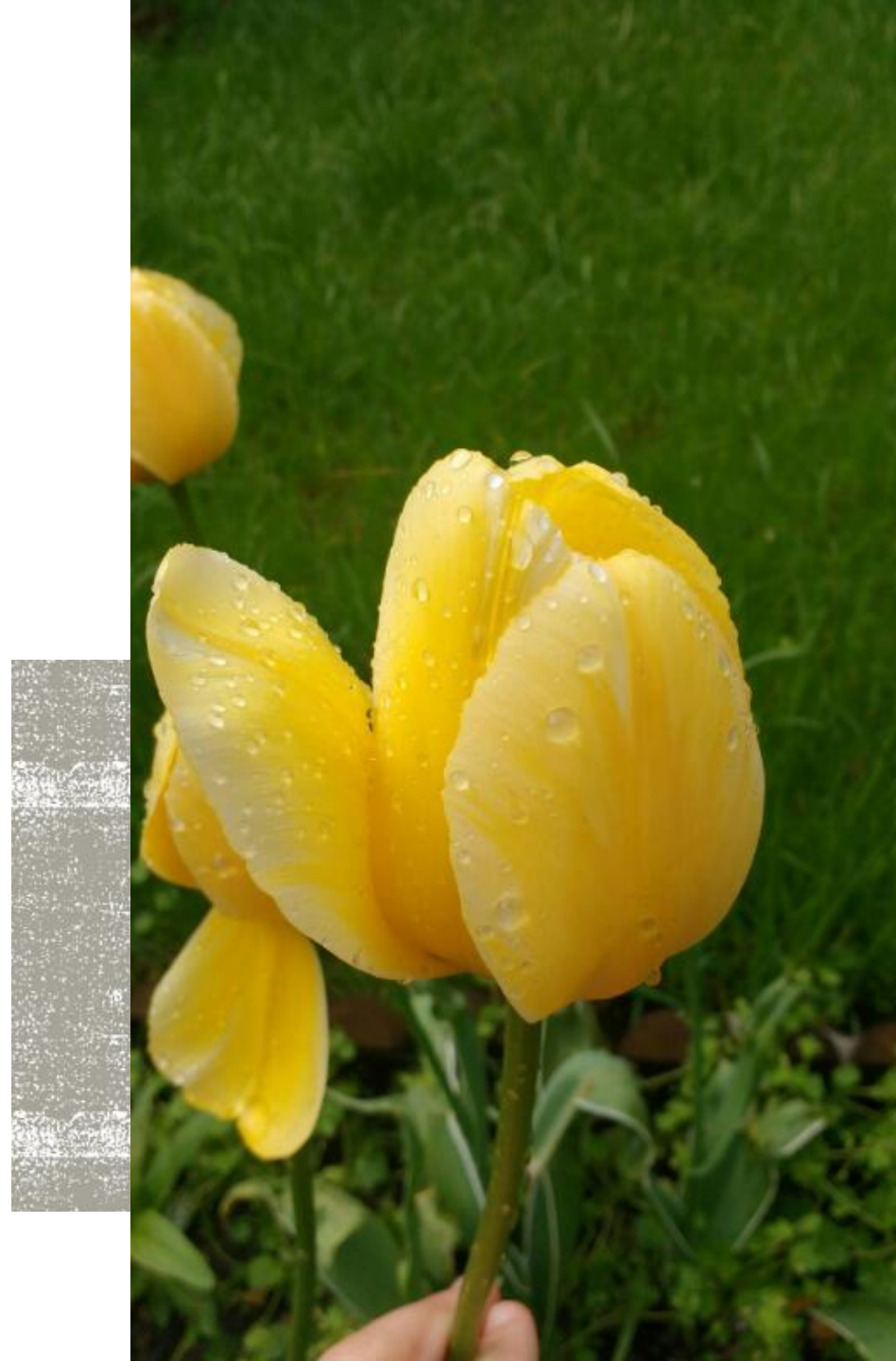
A: They were just **like tiny buds but you could see all the different colours** and they were in individual rows

F: oh cool

A: cute yeah

F: have you noticed anything in particular?

K: I think the thing I notice now is like the birds in the morning, because I usually work at **my desk in the morning and have a huge window, so when I open that you can hear all the birds, its really nice.**

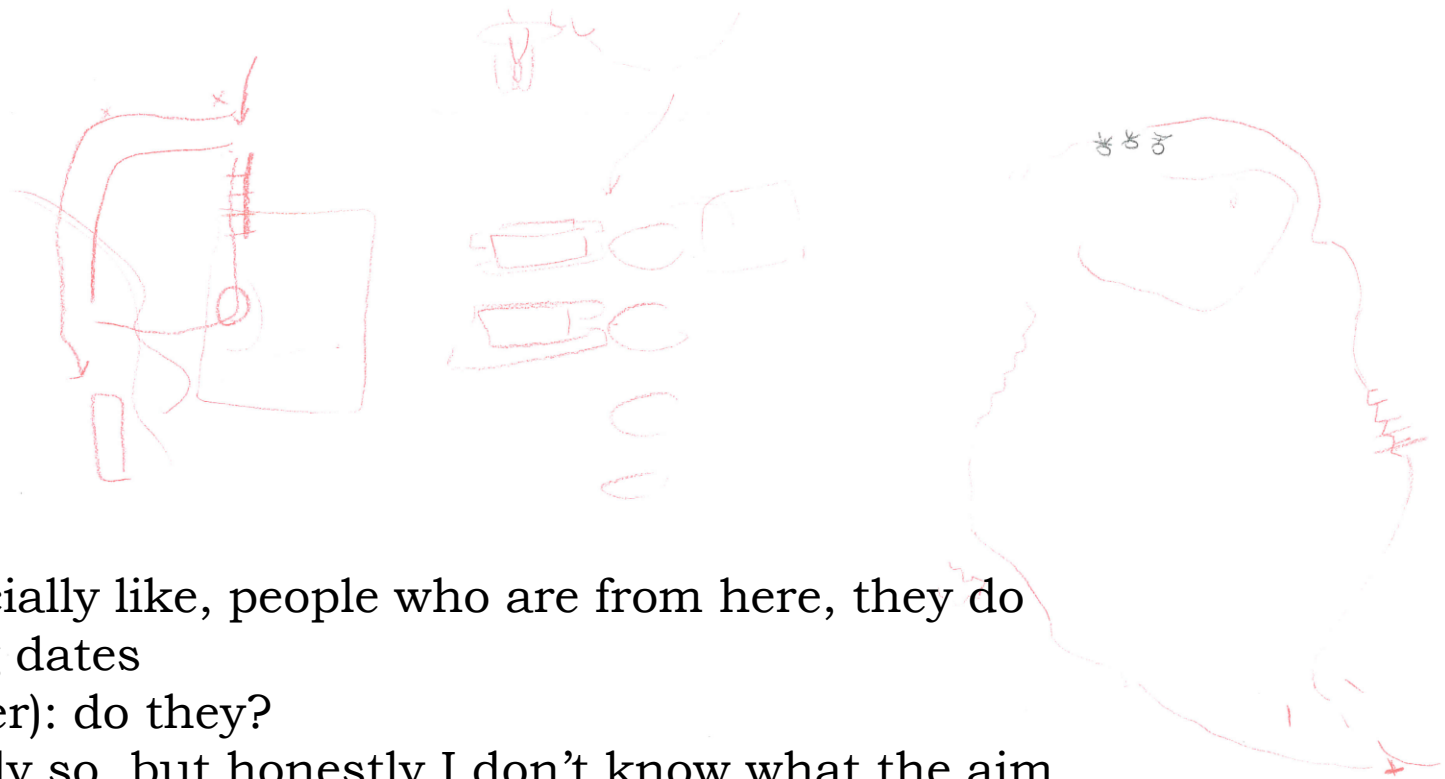


"I think you're asking for trouble if you're walking through a public green space if it's dark and late at night." Male participant aged 22



"I was like 'ah it's going to be quiet easy' but then I feel like when I was looking at things like flowers in the city centre there's so much litter." Female participant age 20





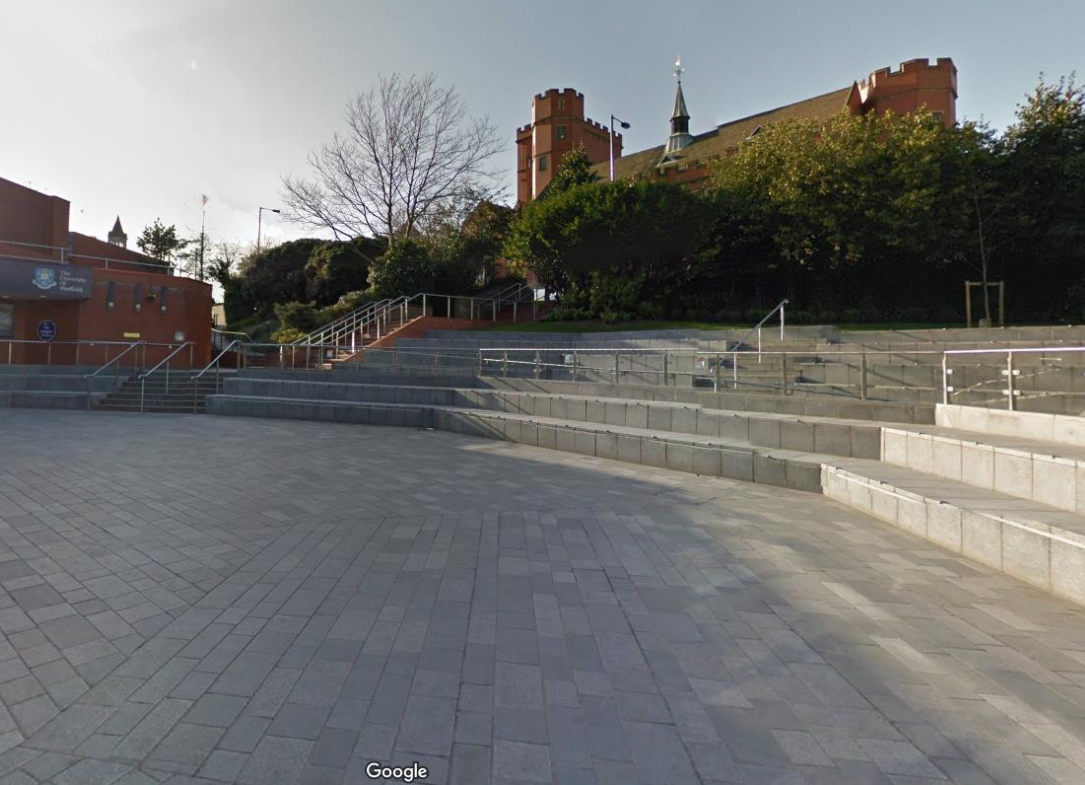
P: [...] especially like, people who are from here, they do like walking dates

F (researcher): do they?

P: apparently so, but honestly I don't know what the aim of this is, **I'm having to constantly think of things to say and it's like why are we walking!** I need a destination basically, I can't just be walkin'.

F: unless you're in the city centre and then you're happy to walk around, wonder...

P: yeah! But I think that's because there's distractions and things, to **me there are distractions and to other they appreciate the distraction of nature I guess.**



## Current spaces on campus

**Are there any spaces on campus which are nature or urban which you particularly like?**

“Are there green spaces on campus? \*Laughing\* That’s my questions.”

“I quite like out by the octagon where there’s those steps you can sit on”





## Current spaces on campus

“I really like firth court, it is kinda my building, it’s just as you got through there’s a massive staircase in the entrance as there’s a courtyard and it’s just pretty and calm”







## Where do you eat your lunch?

There's that patch of grass by the IC [library].



“like if you where to just come out of the diamond and there was just a bit patch of grass instead of sitting like if you're in the diamond all day doing work, instead like **we'll go sit on them little step things outside to eat my lunch,**”





## Current spaces on campus

What do you think of those new things they've put in by the diamond? The square plant boxes..

“I never pay much attention to them”

“I think like cos it's so busy there I'd never sit there, cos it's just like everyone walking. You'd probably bump into ten people you know sitting there.”

“it's like if I'm there it because I want to get some work so I never stop around that area.”





# University students noticing nature





# Opportunities

“I welcome trees”

“you could go eat on a big patch of grass that would be **so much better.**”

“Definitely like **trees**, trees bushes, **shrubby**. But not in planters and things like that not really set out in that way, but **all incorporated together.**

Again some spaces you can just even plots of **grass** you can sit on if it’s dry.

But I like the idea of things having like being put there and then **people who are using it deciding how to use that spaces.** So it’s not like a set way. This is a bench so you sit on it. But I prefer structures that could be a bench could be something you put your bike on, something you could hold a rally there, a platform for you to stand on. **A place where someone could busk.**”





# Opportunities

- Positive wellbeing affect
- Students reported enjoying taking time out of their studying to walk around the park
- Opportunity to meet new people and explore new area
- Sheffield has local green space to the university
- New Estates Plan!
- Students like green





# Challenges

me- would you have used the app if you didn't get £20?

P1- probably not

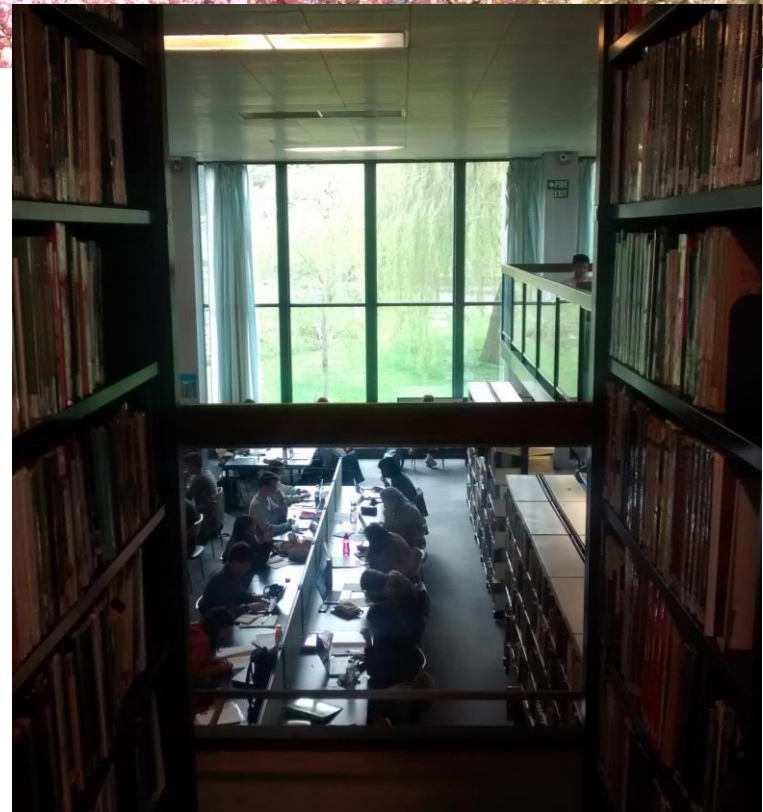
P2 -I dunno, maybe, I quite like the green space thing you know, so if it was volunteering for it

“yeah [...] apps, are a bit weird because you're meant to be getting away from your phone but it's on your phone.”



# Challenges

“Thinking [about] who I study with in the library, **they would probably laugh at me** [if I suggested going outside for a break] but then they would come anyway. We’re always thinking of stupid stuff, someone suggested going to the zoo and we all laughed at them. But we’ll probably go to the zoo.”



“The only time I’m going to campus is for a reason, I wouldn’t generally chill there. So if I’m going to do work there, **I won’t do it outside because the set ups not right.** I wouldn’t think ‘ooh I’ll go sit outside at uni’”





# Challenges

- Social and academic activities priority
- Safety concerns in evenings and early morning as well as at night
- Current spaces often hard concrete landscapes
- Weather
- Mobile phone counterintuitive to noticing nature







# Future Research

Considering the impact of mental health on grade attainment, retention and social cohesion, could university campus landscapes become the next league table?



**IWUN**

Improving wellbeing through urban nature



The  
University  
Of  
Sheffield.

# Thank you

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Photographs authors own unless stated otherwise.

