



Position Statement: Being well with nature

Final version

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Achieving more for nature



GLNP
GREATER LINCOLNSHIRE
NATURE PARTNERSHIP

Introduction

The Greater Lincolnshire Nature Partnership (GLNP) received official status as a Local Nature Partnership on 17 July 2012 and was formally launched on 8 November 2012. This followed an extensive consultation period and application process that resulted from the publication of 'The Natural Choice' White Paper in June 2011. The GLNP is building on the success of its predecessor organisation the Lincolnshire Biodiversity Partnership.

Health and wellbeing through nature has become an important focus for the GLNP since the introduction of the 'Being well with nature' workstream in 2017.

The agreed vision for the Being well with nature workstream is: *For the value of nature to public health and wellbeing to be recognised and valued within the wider health sector. See the Business Plan for more details on planned actions under this workstream.*

1. Work together to ensure that there are positive outcomes for both health and environmental sectors

There is an opportunity for health and environmental sectors to work together to achieve positive outcomes for both nature and health and wellbeing. To achieve this, it is important that both sectors understand how the other works and what their role is within this partnership.

While the key role of the environmental sector is as the caretakers of the natural environment and the key role of the health sector will be as its users, there is also scope for the provision of nature-based intervention (for example green gyms) by the environmental organisations and investment into the natural environment by health stakeholders.

Both sectors should share evidence and lessons learnt to aid positive outcomes and should strive to adopt consistent terminology.

2. Accept the growing evidence base for nature's benefit to health and wellbeing

It is important to recognise that interaction with nature is beneficial to both physical and mental health and wellbeing as described by an increasing body of evidence. The cost of health and wellbeing is high, with mental health alone costing the economy an estimated £70-100 billion per year¹. Current trends also suggest that occurrences of non-communicable diseases are on the rise², which means that UK health services face increased strain on finances.

Where appropriate, quality natural space and nature-based interventions offer a valuable and cost-effective alternative to traditional care. Studies have typically shown that nature-based interventions for mental health and wellbeing result in savings to society³. Research

¹ Natural England (2016) Access to Evidence Information Note EIN018

² Natural England (2016) Access to Evidence Information Note EIN020

³ Natural England (2016) Access to Evidence Information Note EIN018

also shows that population level exposure to natural environments is positively associated with increased levels of physical activity, positive mental outcomes and lower mortality rates for a number of non-communicable diseases.⁴

In addition to the benefits received through interactions with nature, natural space also has wider benefits including mitigating against the atmospheric effects of urban living such as poor air quality (from pollution) and higher temperatures (the urban heat island). This mitigation effect was valued at over £211m per year in 2015 for UK urban areas alone. This was achieved through reduced respiratory and cardiovascular hospital admissions as well as reduced life years lost and reduced deaths⁵. The importance of this mitigation will continue to increase in light of the ongoing effects being felt as a result of climate change.

The types of natural space that generate benefits are hugely diverse; the natural environment sector understands that not all green spaces will be biodiversity rich ones yet the benefits to health may be significant.

3. Improve levels of health and wellbeing through prevention

Prevention is key to ensuring good mental and physical health and wellbeing for both the individual and the population as a whole. The NHS Long Term Plan⁶ calls for increased importance to be placed on prevention to reduce the growing demand on the healthcare system, while an aim of Lincolnshire's Joint Health and Wellbeing Strategy⁷ is to focus on prevention and embed it across all health and care services.

The natural environment has an important role to play here, *A Green Future: Our 25 Year Plan to Improve the Environment*⁸ highlights the importance of nature for the prevention of mental health problems while *Spatial Planning for Health*⁹ includes the natural environment as a wider determinant of health. Both sectors must be aware of this.

4. Increase access to nature

It is important that everyone has access to nature, offering opportunities for health promotion and to help address issues of health inequity.

Access can mean a number of things from simply seeing nature (for example a view out of a hospital window) to physically interacting with it. But there can be a number of barriers, both actual (for example lack of consideration for wheelchair users) and perceived (such as potential users think it is private).

⁴ Diabetes Type 2, cardiovascular and respiratory disease

⁵ Office for National Statistics (2018) UK natural capital: ecosystem accounts for urban areas

⁶ The NHS Long term plan (2019)

⁷ Joint Health and Wellbeing Strategy (2018)

⁸ A Green Future: Our 25 Year Plan to Improve the Environment (2018)

⁹ Spatial Planning for Health (2017)



The possibility of physical barriers should be considered at the design stage of natural spaces where feasible or through alterations to suitable existing spaces. Wider physical barriers to natural space, such as transport and safe pedestrian routes, must also be considered when deciding the location of new spaces or facilitating greater access to existing ones.

Signposting and link workers, such as those based in GP clinics, are key to overcoming non-physical and perceived barriers. Link workers support people in accessing social prescribing opportunities and should be in a position to offer a wide range of options, including those which are nature based. This will allow them to direct people to the opportunities most appropriate for them. To this end the environment sector should provide clear information on the opportunities available to ensure social prescribing makes full use of natural spaces and nature-based interventions. It is also important that the environment sector helps link workers understand the effectiveness of nature-based interventions and that they are held in the same standing as other social prescribing opportunities. The development of national quality standards will improve confidence in nature-based intervention throughout the wider healthcare sector.

In a similar manner the environment sector should work closely with primary care providers, such as GPs and other practice staff. It is also important that they are supported by the wider health sector in the move to include referral to nature-based interventions to ensure frontline services do not suffer during the transition.

Where nature-based interventions are undertaken they should be monitored and serve to add to the body of evidence on the topic. This is particularly pertinent for mental health interventions given the lack of evidence based and trialled research to date.

5. Adopt policies and practice

To deliver the aims of the NHS Long Term Plan, the benefits of the natural environment to health and wellbeing must be included. Natural space can play a fundamental role in this. To enable delivery of this the benefits of the natural environment to health and wellbeing must be included in both national and local health and natural environment policy and at every level of care and prevention.

Efforts should be made to ensure that accessible natural space and nature-based interventions are included in health strategies to send a clear signal of the acceptance of these methods of care. Information on the multiple benefits and lower cost of these interventions will help generate the best outcomes for health and wellbeing.

In addition, policy should require the identification of opportunities for green care and nature-based interventions within social prescribing strategies/networks. This is especially

beneficial where it involves taking part in conservation activities due to the additional benefits this brings for the natural environment.

6. Plan for green space

The importance of accessible natural space should be recognised within national and local planning policy. Policy should strengthen planning recommendations regarding access to safe private and public, quality natural spaces.

Greening of existing urban or residential space or of new developments should be considered as a key element in the prevention of and intervention in health and wellbeing issues at a population level. It must be recognised by the health and planning sectors as an opportunity to improve health and wellbeing as well as benefitting net gain in terms of natural space.

The combined influence of the natural environment and health sectors will be more persuasive when looking to local authorities to deliver quality natural spaces designed into new developments and added to existing residential areas. As important is a process for ongoing management of these spaces, to ensure the benefits continue to be realised in the long term.

The NHS should be encouraged to lead by example by making the most of the land they own and developing patient and community-friendly natural spaces.

7. Enhance biodiversity and improve health

While there is a large and expanding evidence base on the benefits of nature to health and wellbeing there is little empirical evidence for the benefits of health to nature. Given the importance of access to nature in regard to health and wellbeing, there should be at the minimum no net loss of biodiversity, in fact net gains in biodiversity should be sought.

Ideally, accessible green space should be developed with a view to create mutual benefits for both health and wellbeing and biodiversity. This means net gain in biodiversity, which is a key factor in the continuation of processes which enable nature to exist and therefore provide benefits for people.

Similarly, it is important that continued research into the links between biodiversity and health and wellbeing is undertaken.



Further information

- **HM Government (2018) A Green Future: Our 25 Year Plan to Improve the Environment**
https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/693158/25-year-environment-plan.pdf
- **Lincolnshire County Council (2018) Joint Health and Wellbeing Strategy for Lincolnshire**
<https://www.lincolnshire.gov.uk/downloads/file/2345/joint-health-and-wellbeing-strategy>
- **Natural England (2016) Access to Evidence Information Note EIN018**
publications.naturalengland.org.uk/file/4681263907078144
- **Natural England (2016) Access to Evidence Information Note EIN020**
publications.naturalengland.org.uk/file/4885062252756992
- **NHS (2019) The NHS Long term plan** <https://www.longtermplan.nhs.uk/>
- **Office for National Statistics (2018) UK natural capital: ecosystem accounts for urban areas**
<https://www.ons.gov.uk/releases/urbanecosystemaccounts>
- **Public Health England (2017) Spatial Planning for Health: An evidence resource for planning and designing healthier places**
https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/729727/spatial_planning_for_health.pdf
- **Public Health England (2014) Local Action on Health Inequalities: Improving access to green spaces**
https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/355792/Briefing8_Green_spaces_health_inequalities.pdf#:~:text=Improving%20access%20to%20green%20spaces%20Summary%201.%20There,is%20unequal%20access%20to%20green%20space%20across%20England.
- **Public Health England (2020) Improving access to greenspace: A new review for 2020**
https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/904439/Improving_access_to_greenspace_2020_review.pdf#:~:text=Improving%20access%20to%20greenspace%3A%20A%20new%20review%20for,and%20other%20rights%20of%20way%2C%20and%20are%20the



Position Statement: Being well with nature

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