

Scottish Wildlife Trust Briefing

Taking Scotland Forward debate:

Delivering a Healthier Scotland



Nature is part of the solution to delivering a healthier Scotland

The Scottish Wildlife Trust believes Scotland needs a step change in how it tackles the underlying causes of ill health to move towards a healthier nation. Nature has a role to play; people who are connected with their natural environment are happier and healthier. Therefore it should be a priority for Government in delivering a healthier Scotland to commit to a smarter allocation of resources and better use of policy incentives regarding Scotland's natural capital to ensure everyone in Scotland, wherever they live, can enjoy the benefits that nature provides.

Preventing ill health

Statistics show that Scotland is not a healthy nation.¹²

- **three in ten** children are at risk from being overweight or obese
- **one quarter** of adults are obese and **more than half** are overweight
- **nearly one in ten** adults has two or more symptoms of depression
- **one in ten** children suffer from asthma
- **one in six** adults has heart disease
- **three in ten** adults has high blood pressure
- type II diabetes is **rapidly increasing** and is associated with obesity

Preventing ill health, using nature as a 'green pill' is a cost effective way to help deliver a healthier nation. Investing more in nature, backed by smart policies to help Scotland become a healthier nation, makes economic sense too. Presently less than 1.5 % of Scotland's budget is invested in the natural environment. But this doesn't make economic sense when we know the environment we live in is hugely important in shaping our lives and consequently our health; being in high quality greenspace is good for you and being able to access it from your doorstep encourages physical activity and is a stress buster.^{3,4,5,6,7}

We also know being sick is very costly: obesity and being overweight has been estimated to have an economic cost of between £900 million and £4 billion per annum in Scotland.^{8,9} With obesity levels set to rise, the cost of obesity to NHS Scotland alone is likely to reach at least £3 billion by 2030.¹⁰

Tackling inequalities

Being able to access and enjoy the benefits of nature from your doorstep should not depend on where you live. Yet, it is still the case that the most economically deprived areas in Scotland are often the most nature deprived.¹¹ People living in the most deprived areas are also the least satisfied with their local greenspace. Not surprisingly, some never visit their local greenspace or the wider outdoors compared to other groups.^{12,13}

It is also true that those living in areas with multiple deprivation have the highest combination of health problems and the poorest health.¹⁴ So, depriving these communities of the health and wellbeing benefits that accessible nature can bring must compound this problem.

Investing in nature, either through retrofitting and greening local public spaces or 'designing in' nature-rich greenspaces in new developments, would help tackle this health inequality. Research shows this approach works - income related health inequalities are reduced by having easy access to high quality greenspace.¹⁵

Childhood development

Nature is important to children's development in every major way - intellectually, emotionally, socially, spiritually, and physically¹⁶

Children are entitled to the best start in life wherever they live; and as part of this they need contact with nature for healthy childhood development.¹⁷ The benefits for children from connecting with nature - '*Natural Ritalin*' are well known^{18, 19} and include reducing the severity of childhood Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder²⁰ and helping in cognitive development.²¹ Having local access to greenspace also encourages children to be more active.²² Living close to a green environment has other health benefits too - respiratory disorders such as childhood asthma - made worse by poor urban air quality - can also be reduced (e.g. by planting street trees to trap particulate matter²³).

The evidence makes it clear: places where children live, play and learn must include natural features. This is also an essential part of tackling the inequalities in life chances that still exist for many of Scotland's children today.

Actions and policies required

Health service

- Increased links between Directorates relating to health, communities and environment – to join up priorities, policies and make better use of resources
- Prescribing a 'green pill' where appropriate e.g. green gyms; community gardening, conservation activities
- Health and wellbeing benefits of contact with nature to be part of medical curriculum
- Health economics - research exploring total costs and benefits of budget shifting in order to strengthen the economic case for prioritising environmental investment especially in areas of multiple deprivation

Places

- Scottish Planning Policy (SPP) – many of the 'shoulds' regarding green infrastructure, natural environment, designated sites and woodlands need to become 'musts' - otherwise there will be no step change to protect and improve the quality of green infrastructure being delivered by developers e.g. see Sections 194 - 233 in current SPP
- Adoption of natural capital standard for green infrastructure – which is a tool developed by Scottish Wildlife Trust to assess the quality of the greenspace in development (should become statutory in planning policy)
- All new build schools must be designed and located to have access to nature-rich places – either as part of school grounds or within walking distance

What the Scottish Wildlife Trust is doing

The Scottish Wildlife Trust, as part of Cumbernauld Living Landscape is working with The Conservation Volunteers (TCV) to pilot a wellbeing project in Cumbernauld to demonstrate the potential of high quality greenspace to provide real life benefits for the people and communities who live near them.

The project Wild Ways to Wellbeing is a unique new programme will target three groups of participants who are currently experiencing or at risk of developing mental health issues:

- Adults with recognised mental health needs (referred from NHS health improvement practitioners, community mental health teams and SAMH contacts)
- Young people who are at risk due to wider social and environmental factors
- Older people at risk of developing health issues related to ageing.

Each group will receive five sessions, each session focused on one of the Five Ways Well²⁴ themes. A range of practical and reflective activities including practical volunteering and recording local biodiversity will connect participants with each element of the Wellbeing model through the greenspace in Cumbernauld. The programme aims to reduce health inequalities by targeting recognised at-risk groups within SMID areas and will focus not only on providing health and wellbeing benefits through the sessions themselves, but will build participants' confidence and ability to access these greenspace benefits independently in future.

The pilot is designed with a view to developing longer-term projects focused on reducing the pressures on front line NHS services, supporting communities in accessing greenspace and promoting healthier, happier communities in Cumbernauld and elsewhere. To this end the pilot will include a thorough evaluation and report highlighting strengths and weaknesses and recommending areas for future development for partners (SWT, TCV and NLC/NHS) for future programmes.

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- ¹ Scottish Health Survey 2014 <http://www.gov.scot/Resource/0048/00485546.pdf>
- ² <http://www.diabetes.co.uk/diabetes-scotland.html>
- ³ Forest Research (2010). Benefits of green infrastructure. Report by Forest Research. Forest Research, Farnham
- ⁴ Tanaka A., Takano T., Nakamura K., (1996) Health levels influence by urban residential conditions in a megacity. *Tokyo Urban Studies* 33: 879–945.
- ⁵ Sugiyama T., Thompson C.W., (2007). Older people's health, outdoor activity and supportiveness of neighbourhood environments. *Landscape and urban planning*. Vol 83 (2-3) 168-175
- ⁶ Jonker, et al. 2014 The effect of urban green on small-area (healthy) life expectancy *J Epidemiol Community Health*; 68:999–1002.
- ⁷ Mitchel et al. 2015 Neighborhood Environments and Socioeconomic Inequalities in Mental Well-Being. *American Journal of Preventive Medicine*
- ⁸ SPICe briefing: Obesity in Scotland January 2015
- ⁹ Author took into account: loss of productivity attributable to loss of life or impaired life quality, direct health care costs, and investment to mitigate the impact of obesity.
- ¹⁰ See British Medical Association website: <http://bma.org.uk/working-for-change/improving-and-protecting-health/obesity/obesity-policy-and-facts> Accessed March 2015
- ¹¹ Allen, J. (2013) Health Inequalities and Open Space. Presentation. UCL Institute of Health Equity
- ¹² SNH Report (2014): Attitudes to greenspace in Scotland a review of key trends between 2004 and 2013
- ¹³ The Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD) ranks small areas from the most deprived to the least deprived. The surveys referred to in the report relate to the 10-15% most deprived areas.
- ¹⁴ The Scottish Health Survey 2014. A National Statistics Publication for Scotland
- ¹⁵ Mitchell R, Popham F (2008). Effect of exposure to natural environment on health and inequalities: an observational population study. *The Lancet*, Volume 372, Issue 9650, pp1655- 1660.
- ¹⁶ Kellert, Stephen R. "Nature and Childhood Development." In *Building for Life: Designing and Understanding the Human-Nature Connection*. Washington, D.C.: Island Press, 2005.
- ¹⁷ See: Research developed by the Children & Nature Network (C&NN) and available at www.childrenandnature.org.
- ¹⁸ Kellert, Stephen R. "Nature and Childhood Development." In *Building for Life: Designing and Understanding the Human-Nature Connection*. Washington, D.C.: Island Press, 2005.
- ¹⁹ Moore, R. C., & Cooper Marcus, C. (2008). "Healthy planet, healthy children: Designing nature into the daily spaces of childhood." In S. Kellert, J. Heerwagen & M. Mador (Eds.), *Biophilic design: Theory, science and practice*. Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons, Inc
- ²⁰ Faber Taylor, A., & Kuo, F. E. (2008). Children with attention deficits concentrate better after walk in the park. *Journal of Attention Disorders OnlineFirst*
- ²¹ Davdand et al. 2015 Green spaces and cognitive development in primary schoolchildren *PNAS* 12 no. 26 7937–7942
- ²² Moore, R. C., & Cooper Marcus, C. (2008). "Healthy planet, healthy children: Designing nature into the daily spaces of childhood." In S. Kellert, J. Heerwagen & M. Mador (Eds.), *Biophilic design: Theory, science and practice*. Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons, Inc.
- ²³ UK National Ecosystem Assessment (2011) page 388
- ²⁴ Connect: with the people around you - your family, friends, colleagues and neighbours; Be active: find the activity that you enjoy and make it a part of your life; Take notice: be more aware of the present moment, including your feelings and thoughts, your body and the world around you; Keep learning: learning new skills can give you a sense of achievement and a new confidence; Give: from a simple kind word through to volunteering at your local community centre, giving can improve your mental wellbeing and help you build new social networks.