



Response to Major conditions strategy call for evidence

Nature and Wellbeing Strategy Group, Wildlife and Countryside Link, June 2023

About Wildlife and Countryside Link:

Wildlife and Countryside Link is a coalition of 70 environmental organisations in England, using their strong joint voice for the protection and enhancement of nature.

This Link response is supported by: Bat Conservation Trust, British Mountaineering Council, Friends of the Earth England, Froglife, John Muir Trust, People's Trust for Endangered Species, The Conservation Volunteers, The Wildlife Trusts, Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust, and Wildlife Gardening Forum.

For more information about this response, please contact Emma Clarke (emma.clarke@wcl.org.uk).

Responses to selected [consultation questions](#):

Question: Do you have any suggestions on how we can support people to tackle these risk factors?
Yes / No

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There is strong scientific evidence of the physical and mental health benefits of a wider healthy natural environment, access to and engagement in high-quality natural spaces, and connection to nature.

Recent reviews have found that that spending at least 120 minutes a week in nature leads to a significant increase in health and wellbeing¹ and that people living in areas with higher amounts of green spaces have lower mortality.² People who are more connected to nature tend to experience more positive affect, vitality, and life satisfaction compared to those less connected to nature.^{3,4,5} The psychological benefits of nature increase with biodiversity. More species-rich urban greenspaces were found to boost the positive effects on visitors.⁶

There are a variety of pathways by which a healthy natural environment, access to and engagement in high-quality natural spaces, and connection to nature positively impacts health and wellbeing, including through creating cleaner air, mitigating urban heating, reducing noise pollutions, giving people places for physical exercise, and increased social engagement. As well, simple exposure to

¹ <https://www.nature.com/articles/s41598-019-44097-3>

² <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/26540085/>

³ <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/25249992/>

⁴ <https://www.internationaljournalofwellbeing.org/index.php/ijow/article/view/1267>

⁵ <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S1438463917302699>

⁶ <https://royalsocietypublishing.org/doi/abs/10.1098/rsbl.2007.0149>



nature has been found to be psychologically restorative and has beneficial influences on individuals' emotions and ability to reflect on life problems.⁷ Nature connectedness and engaging with nature through simple activities, such as smelling the flowers, was found to be a significant factor in influencing mental health and wellbeing.⁸ The Public Health England's 2020 review 'Improving access to greenspace' is a comprehensive analysis of the linkages between access to nature and health benefits.⁹

There are particularly strong benefits for certain demographic who are most at risk of health problems, including deprived communities, people from ethnic minority backgrounds, young people and people with disabilities, who are also most likely to experience a degraded natural environment and face barriers in accessing and engaging with nature.¹⁰ Evidence shows, in particular, that people from deprived areas are less likely to experience poor mental health if they live near blue space.¹¹

There is also strong evidence of the cost savings to the NHS from investment in nature. The Government itself found that if everyone in England had access to good quality spaces, this could save the NHS an estimated £2.1 billion every year just in treatment costs.¹² A wider research study found that an investment of £5.5 billion in green infrastructure across the UK would bring a total of £200 billion in benefits.¹³

To restore and enhance the natural environment in England, to improve people's access to and engagement with nature, and to promote nature connectedness, we recommend:

- Restore and enhance the wider natural environment in England by:
 - o Delivering the pledge to effectively protect at least 30% of land and sea in England.
 - o Meeting the targets under the Environment Act, including the target to halt the decline in species abundance by 2030.
 - o Effectively implementing the new tools and policies in the Environment Act including Biodiversity Net Gain and Local Nature Recovery Strategies.
 - o Doubling the budget for agroecological farming and land management.
 - o Introducing a comprehensive nitrogen strategy, which includes complementary regulatory and non-regulatory measures in line with the Global Biodiversity Framework Target 7 to reduce pollution from all sources to levels that are not harmful to biodiversity and ecosystem functions and services by 2030.

⁷ <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC5663018/>

⁸ <https://www.internationaljournalofwellbeing.org/index.php/ijow/article/view/1267>

⁹

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/904439/improving_access_to_greenspace_2020_review.pdf

¹⁰ <https://www.groundwork.org.uk/about-groundwork/reports/outofbounds/>

¹¹ <https://www.nature.com/articles/s41598-022-17089-z#:~:text=Living%20near%20blue%20space%20modified,for%20those%20in%20the%20medium>

¹² <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/investing-in-nature-is-an-investment-in-the-nhs-says-environment-agency-chief-executive>

¹³ <https://www.nationaltrust.org.uk/press-release/new-research-shows-55bn-fund-needed-to-level-up-access-to-urban-green-space-as-part-of-uks-green-recovery>



- Committing to a strong UK Chemicals Strategy, which would introduce strict controls on groups of harmful chemicals and chemical cocktails, phase out known toxic chemicals and better monitor chemicals in the environment.
- Improve the provision and quality of nature-rich accessible green and blue spaces for people to access and enjoy by:
 - Introducing a new human right to a healthy natural environment, in the form of the Environmental Rights Bill.
 - Adding a duty on local authorities to reduce health inequalities through the exercise of their planning functions, including by improving access to nature in a local area. The Government should accept the amendment to this effect to the Levelling Up and Regeneration Bill, which has cross-party and expert support.
 - All new development should meet minimum locally-set standards of the provision of green infrastructure for people. In existing development, local authorities and other public bodies should seek to improve the provision and quality of natural spaces, supported by sufficient funding.
 - Strengthening the statutory purposes for National Parks and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty for nature's recovery and connecting people with these protected landscapes.
 - Embedding public access options in the new Environmental Land Management system of farm support, helping farmers to create more opportunities for people to enjoy the outdoors.
 - Removing the new 2031 deadline for footpaths to be registered under the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000. The re-imposition of this deadline risks thousands of footpaths being lost.
 - Investing in widely publicizing the Countryside Code, to promote greater environmental responsibility and good practice.
 - Considering legislative reform to expand legal rights for public access to nature, such as the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 (Amendment) Bill, a Private Members Bill proposed by Caroline Lucas MP on this topic, which is due to have its second reading in the House of Commons on 1 December 2023.
- Use NHS estates to improve people's access to nature by:
 - Including a plan for improving the quality, accessibility and use of NHS estates in ICS's Green Plans.
 - Creating green and blue space within areas accessed by NHS patients and staff.
- Encourage nature connection by:
 - Giving climate and sustainability and outdoor learning a place in every subject in the curriculum at all levels and in all settings. Outdoor learning as a framework should be integrated across all subjects, supported by teacher training and support.
 - Funding green social prescribing as an approach to connect people with nature to deliver improved mental and physical health and wellbeing.



Question: Do you have any suggestions on how we can better support and provide treatment for people after a diagnosis? **Yes / No**

Question: How can we better support and provide treatment for people after a diagnosis? You might consider suggestions that help people to manage and live well with their conditions, with support from both medical and non-medical settings. Suggestions for multiple conditions / CVD / chronic respiratory diseases / MSK / dementia.

There is significant evidence that a healthy natural environment, access to and engagement in natural spaces, and connection to nature can aid recovery in recovery from illness and help with managing poor health.

There are a variety of pathways by which nature positively impacts health and wellbeing, including through creating cleaner air, mitigating urban heating, reducing noise pollutions, giving people places for physical exercise, and increased social engagement. As well, simple exposure to nature has been found to be psychologically restorative and has beneficial influences on individuals' emotions and ability to reflect on life problems.¹⁴ Nature connectedness and engaging with nature through simple activities, such as smelling the flowers, was found to be a significant factor in influencing mental health and wellbeing.¹⁵ The Public Health England's 2020 review 'Improving access to greenspace' is a comprehensive analysis of the linkages between access to nature and health benefits.¹⁶

The groups that have the great health challenges, including people already in poor health, older people, those with a physical disability, access and engage less with greenspace, and so have less opportunity to benefit from it. On the other hand, the Public Health England review found that access to nature can convey a disproportionately high health benefit to disadvantaged groups. For these reasons, improving access to nature is particularly important in the context of widening health inequalities in England.

To restore and enhance the natural environment in England, to improve people's access to and engagement with nature, and to promote nature connectedness, we recommend:

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- Introducing a comprehensive nitrogen strategy, which includes complementary regulatory and non-regulatory measures in line with the Global Biodiversity Framework Target 7 to reduce pollution from all sources to levels that are not harmful to biodiversity and ecosystem functions and services by 2030.
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