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Natural solutions

Nature's role in delivering well-being and key policy
goals – opportunities for the third sector

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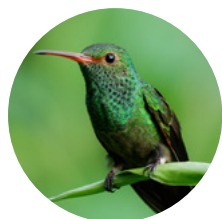
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Well-being

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Executive summary

The natural environment underpins our social and economic systems; it makes life on Earth possible and worth living. As well as its intrinsic value, it contributes to the delivery of key policy goals and plays a critical role in responding to the economic and environmental challenges that our society faces today by increasing our resilience and encouraging a more sustainable lifestyle. Yet in spite of the growing evidence, we are failing to realise its potential.

In the context of economic and environmental crisis, governments will need to find new ways to deliver well-being to society. The natural environment is a key resource to do so in a cost-effective way.

Through their ongoing work, several organisations are already revealing the potential of the natural environment, strengthening the case for it to be placed at the centre of policies for economic recovery and well-being. Whilst some of the existing evidence and practice are already recognised in key policies, the natural environment is still all too often presented as a problem instead of a solution.

This report provides an overview of the multiple ways in which the natural environment is being used to deliver key society goals. It reveals how organisations with different missions share a common interest in having a healthy environment.

Whilst the report focuses on what goods and services the environment gives us rather than on its intrinsic value, it is not our goal to reinforce an often unhelpful tendency that just views the environment from a utilitarian perspective (i.e. what can the environment do for me?). The value of the environment goes far beyond that. Funded by the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation, the ultimate goal of the report is to identify interventions to realise the potential of the natural environment through coordinated action by a broad group of organisations.

Over the past few months, **nef** (the new economics foundation) has reviewed existing literature and carried out interviews with representatives of 33 different organisations with the goal of answering the following questions:

- What evidence is out there linking nature with well-being, and nature with pro-environmental behaviours?

- Is this evidence taken into consideration in policy-making?

- How are third sector organisations using the existing evidence?

- Are third sector organisations working effectively together?

Our research found that:

- **The evidence is abundant and good enough to be taken into consideration by policymakers**. It needs to be further strengthened and disseminated in order to influence public spending.

- **The existing evidence is not being fully exploited**. There is an increasing awareness in policy circles about the multiple benefits of the natural environment to society. However, the vast majority of policymakers are not fully aware of it.

- **Action at the national level remains a key priority but action at the local level is likely to become more effective as – and if – government's localism interest materialises**. Local governments are likely to have greater decision-making powers and competences. Health and well-being boards and local nature partnerships are clear opportunities to advance the nature-well-being agenda.

- **There are several examples of innovative partnerships** amongst and between third sector organisations and the private and public sectors.

- **Better coordination with other organisations is a commonly shared aim** as it makes them more effective at a time of limited resources.

- **There is support for the idea of establishing a platform for information sharing and strategic coordination** to fully exploit existing synergies and new opportunities

In order to realise the potential of the natural environment, we recommend taking action on three main fronts:

- **Encourage information sharing and strategic coordination** among organisations, through the establishment of a network or common platform.

- **Make the most of existing evidence and practice** by packaging it in an accessible and user-friendly format with the goal of:

  - Raising awareness among decision-makers.

  - Informing key organisations not fully engaged in this agenda.

  - Inputting advocacy work into key policy processes and policy.

- **Strengthen evidence,** in particular on the socio-economic benefits of the natural environment and links between nature and pro-environmental behaviour.

The findings of the research suggest that there is a favourable context to bring together a wide range of organisations to translate existing synergies into a louder and more effective voice for a healthier natural environment.

All quotes in blue are from people interviewed and participants in the workshop.

1. Introduction

"The evidence exists; how to use it is the challenge. A key question is how we can work better together to convince the government to change policies and to invest money in the right areas."

About the project

One of the aims of the research project underpinning this report was to map existing activity by third sector organisations linking the natural environment with well-being and key societal goals including the potential to drive change towards more sustainable behaviours. The ultimate goal was to identify key interventions to realise the potential that the natural environment offers to society – in particular to strengthen coordination and effective action by third sector organisations.

Most of the research took place during the second half of 2011 and early 2012. It involved a review of existing literature; 40 phone interviews with representatives from 33 different organisations, mainly third sector ones and a few public sector ones such as Natural England and Primary Care Trusts as well as independent experts; and a workshop with 30 participants from 23 different organisations. (Annex 1 contains a list of interviewees and workshop participants.)

The main challenges of the research involved dealing with the vast amount of information and contacts provided, keeping up to date with the latest developments in a rapidly changing field, and defining the scope of the research involving two very broad concepts – well-being and the natural environment.

In order to identify the myriad activities and existing evidence and to engage a high number of organisations, we adopted a very open approach with two wide-ranging definitions of natural environment and well-being. We used Natural England's definition for natural environment provided in the MENE (Monitoring Engagement in the Natural Environment) survey: 'open spaces in the countryside as well as in towns and cities such as woodlands, parks, farmlands, paths, beaches canals and lakes' which can be equated to 'green space' irrespective of whether this is urban or rural, or whether it has high or low levels of biodiversity.

Well-being was defined as inclusive of both individual and collective well-being. In terms of the contribution of the natural environment to human well-being, we have broadly divided this into two main roles:

- Maintaining the ecosystem goods and services that make life possible on Earth. This includes basic requirements and conditions that allow us to function both as individuals and as a society.

- Providing those goods and services that make life worth living. This includes key societal objectives (e.g. health, education, crime reduction, social cohesion and satisfaction levels).

The research has placed more emphasis on the second point, but it is important to acknowledge that they are interlinked – there is not a clear line dividing them. In spite of the inclusive approach, it is worth noting that it was more difficult to engage with organisations for which the natural environment is not a primary objective (e.g. health) than with those for which nature conservation is a main goal. This was not unexpected but highlighted a key priority for future action.

Given the amount of information available and the ongoing activity in the nature and well-being field, it was not feasible to carry out an in-depth analysis of

all existing information or to capture all existing projects and activities on the ground – particularly those at local level.

The report should not be seen as an exhaustive evidence and policy review but as a representative summary of ongoing activity in the UK in the nature and well-being field. In other words, while the report provides a good overview of existing evidence, policy opportunities and ongoing activities by third sector organisations, there is much more going on out there than has been captured here.

Research findings have been structured in three main sections: evidence, policy and ongoing activity. For each one we provide a summary of the main conclusions and trends arising from the research; a selection of initiatives, studies or projects of relevance to this research; and a selection of quotes from participants.

Another challenge to bear in mind when reading this report is that things changed as we wrote it. Processes evolved, new initiatives arose and policies were developed and implemented. Whilst we've aimed to double-check the status of initiatives and policy processes, it is likely that the report contains information that has already become out of date or that it is likely to do so within a few months.

Context

This report is written at a critical time for modern economies, especially those in the Eurozone or those that, like the UK, are feeling its effects. Western economies have come to a halt, with high debts and no immediate prospects for growth. Unemployment is rising, governments are indebted, public services are being retrenched and levels of public investment are at a record low. This has had huge implications for the natural environment; however bad things are now, they will get a lot worse for the environment before they get better.

No one contests the need to stabilise the economy, create employment and avoid bankruptcy in the public sector, but this cannot be done at all costs. There are two other crises in addition to the economic one: the environmental crisis and the energy crisis. Climate change, the over-exploitation of natural resources and dependence on non-renewable resources like oil creates ecological instability and increase the vulnerability of our social and economic system.

In this context, governments will need to start thinking of new ways to deliver well-being and meet key society goals with fewer resources. This will need to be done in a way which does not increase our vulnerability to climate change and natural resource scarcity. The natural environment can provide many solutions to this challenge by:

- Providing key ecosystem services and increasing our resilience to climate change and resource scarcity shocks.

- Supporting the delivery of key policy goals (health, education, social cohesion) in a cost-effective way.

- Encouraging change towards more sustainable behaviours.

In spite of this, the way that the UK has responded to the economic crisis has largely disregarded the natural environment and, like other EU countries, when this is considered it is presented as a barrier rather than as a key component of the solution to the crisis. To illustrate how far the government is from putting the natural environment at the centre of economic recovery policies, one need look no further than the UK Chancellor's pre-budget and budget speeches in 2011 and 2012, in which he made remarks against the EU Habitats Directive, nature conservation legislation and the Red Tape Challenge aimed at simplifying nature conservation legislation.

"Evidence and levels of awareness are not the barriers to making the most of natural environment; barriers have more to do with culture and the existing 'silo' mentality, which is hard to change."

"The existing evidence of benefits of the natural environment is not exploited enough; it is actually massively underexploited."

The third sector plays a key role in demonstrating the value of the natural environment and encouraging a change in perception to it being viewed as a solution, rather than a problem. Many organisations are aware of the critical role the natural environment has in responding to the current challenges and its potential to maintain high levels of well-being in a context of economic crisis. So far, however, this vision remains to be articulated clearly; it has not produced the coordinated advocacy effort needed to put the natural environment at the centre of economic recovery and well-being policies.

2. Research findings

The following sections summarise the findings of our research in relation to the existing evidence linking nature and well-being; nature and sustainable lifestyles; relevant policy processes and opportunities; and current activities by Third Sector organisations in the field of nature and well-being.

Evidence: state of the art and trends

There is a wealth of evidence on links between nature and well-being. They vary in scale (global, national, local), focus (ecosystem services, health, education, etc.) and source (public sector, NGOs).

Some of the studies reviewed describe these benefits in monetary terms. Whilst this appears to be an increasing trend, studies with monetary values remain a minority compared to the overall evidence reviewed – it is not always possible or appropriate to describe certain impacts in monetary terms.

The natural environment as a provider of ecosystem services

The Millennium Ecosystem Assessment,[1] The Economics of Ecosystems and Biodiversity (TEEB),[2] and the UK National Ecosystem Assessment (UKNEA)[3] are three key initiatives describing the benefits that nature delivers to society from an ecosystem service perspective. These three monumental pieces of research articulate the range of ways that people benefit from the natural world and quantify many of these benefits in monetary terms. UKNEA, in particular, provides estimates on the value of different ecosystem services delivered by specific habitats to British citizens.

Whilst most of the organisations interviewed are aware of and familiar with these studies and evidence – some of them have even translated part of this into more user-friendly reports like Natural Foundations[4] (RSPB) or Well-being through wildlife[5] (Birdlife International) – there is a shared view that, in terms of impact, this evidence is still 'massively underexploited' and that there is a need to bring this information to life. In a way one can see the Natural Environment White Paper[6] and the Natural Capital Committee as a response from the government to the findings of the UKNEA.

Pavan Sukhdev, leader of TEEB, as expressed in a conversation in January 2012, agrees that there is a need to translate evidence and the results from TEEB and UKNEA into a user-friendly format so that they can be used effectively by third sector organisations; the Institute of Chartered Accountants in England and Wales (ICAEW) is already doing this for businesses.

A relevant report which goes in this direction is the MEBIE report[7] (*Microeconomic Evidence on the Benefits of Investment in the Environment*) by Natural England; in addition to a summary of the benefits of investing in the natural environment, it provides basic guidance to and a description of key economic terms and methods.

Natural environment's contribution to key society goals

There are several studies describing the role that the natural environment plays in the delivery of key societal goals such as health, education, urban regeneration and crime reduction, many of which include specific policy recommendations.

One of the areas that has received considerable attention is the one linking nature to health outcomes. There is evidence that contact with the natural environment and green space promotes good health, and participation in

"People benefit from ecosystem services provided by the natural environment, but they are very unaware of it."

"There's a feeling that links between nature, health, well-being, etc., are the way forward but the challenge is to identify specific actions. That's what we're missing."

regular physical activity generates physical and mental health benefits. Physical exercise in natural environments (e.g. green gyms) has important implications for public and environmental health and for a wide range of policy sectors. Conservation volunteering, for example, is an activity which has the potential to deliver dividends in terms of environmental conservation as well as well-being and health. Several authors highlight the relevance of environmental experience and contact with nature in childhood to promote children's physical and mental health and well-being.[8,9,10,11,12]

There are also a significant number of studies describing the benefits of the natural environment in the area of education and childhood development as summarised in Box: Nature and Education of this report. Green spaces and outdoor locations provide key environments for effective learning, in particular for children not engaged in formal learning, and can stimulate children's learning abilities and development.

Finally there are studies describing the value of the natural environment as a resource that can help reduce crime levels through re-offending rates and strengthen community cohesion by providing a neutral space for people to meet and interact. The natural environment can also help increase social capital (e.g. trust among people in a community); this is an area which has received less attention but whose relevance can be quite significant.

The natural environment as a catalyser of sustainable behaviours

The links between nature and sustainable lifestyles are complex. Connection to nature is considered to be an important predictor of ecological behaviour and subjective well-being. There are studies analysing how connectedness to nature links with values and attitudes and to what extent these can be good predictors of behaviours.[13] Some studies, such as the one carried by Essex University and BTCV Cymru,[14] reveal a positive link between environmental volunteering and changes towards more pro-environmental behaviours.

However, it is widely accepted that there is a 'value-action gap' and that values and attitudes do not always determine people's actual behaviour. Additionally, information does not always lead to awareness[15] and awareness does not always lead to action.[16] There is agreement that more work is needed on this front, but it is also felt that limited evidence should not lead to this potential being completely overlooked when it comes to new policy development.

Natural England and BTCV are two of the organisations that have been more active in trying to generate evidence. RSPB, WWF-UK, and the National Trust among others have also relevant projects in this area. The Monitoring Engagement with the Natural Environment (MENE) survey[17] collects national data on visits to natural places. Additional attitudinal questions were included on six separate survey waves in 2009/2010. The results from MENE over the past two years are available from Natural England's website including an initial exploration of the relationship between behaviours – in terms of engagement with the natural environment – and attitudes. The MENE survey will be running for at least the next three years.

BTCV's online Management Information System (MIS) provides one of the best tools to improve knowledge on this area. MIS records environmental volunteering activity across the UK in real time, generating data at a number of levels from mass statistics for the whole of the UK, to the action of a single volunteer. BTCV is currently working to translate this information into a user-friendly format. The MIS is a powerful project management tool also used by other organisations (e.g. Natural England, Sustrans and Ramblers) all of which provides a good background to carrying out further analysis and research linking nature with pro-environmental behaviours.

"Governments will need to be convinced in economic terms because they are not interested in the natural environment per se."

"It is very complex to model engagement with the natural environment and changes in behaviour. The value-action gap is a key issue."

"A key area not well understood and with huge potential is the role of natural spaces in supporting social capital."

"Green spaces play a key role in making neighborhoods age-friendly"

Views from respondents

- There is enough evidence but it is not widely spread or taken into account enough in policy processes. What's key is how organisations use this evidence to drive policy change.

- More research is needed to strengthen the evidence case, but this should not be a reason for policymakers to ignore existing evidence.

- The priority now needs to move from strengthening evidence, to making the existing evidence count in policy-making.

- The evidence is starting to get through from the top to the bottom; it is strong enough to count in different policy and government departments, but some argue that it is not strong enough to make it count at 'Treasury' level.

- Government has not put as much emphasis on strengthening this type of evidence as they have in other areas of work. This is particularly evident in the case for health (e.g. drug testing vs. physical activity).

- Expressing benefits in monetary terms helps aid decision-making processes but it can and must not be applied to everything.

- There is a lack of economic capacity among third sector organisations to carry out economic evidenced studies and research.

- Most of the organisations interviewed use existing evidence and quote others, rather than developing their own evidence. Many acknowledge the need to strengthen it and are working towards doing so.

- Measuring the impact of projects in a policy-relevant way is a common priority. Organisations are increasingly interested in providing evidence of how their projects and activities result in a positive contribution to society.

- Project evaluations increasingly describe impacts in terms of contributions to certain policies and try to measure 'hard to capture' impacts (e.g. well-being) in a qualitative way through surveys and questionnaires.

- The Social Return on Investment (SROI) provides a good framework to reveal and measure the economic, social, and environmental value resulting from a particular project. Interest is growing in this methodology which allows organisations to describe £ of value delivered to society per £ invested in a project or activity.

"The medical profession still sees the natural environment as a soft option"

"A key barrier is that health services are still very oriented towards curing rather than preventing."

"More often than not, health is the trigger to get people involved in the natural environment, rather than the natural environment itself."

Nature and health benefits – the evidence

- People living in areas with high levels of green space are three times more likely to be physically active and 40 per cent less likely to be overweight or obese than those with low levels.[18]

- Trees and other vegetation in urban environments can help reduce the problems caused by air pollution. In Europe, air pollution has been calculated to be responsible for 310,000 premature deaths every year. Traffic emissions in cities contribute significantly to this health burden.[19]

- The availability of green spaces within cities is linked to mental well-being and physical fitness of the population, although the health benefits are difficult to quantify[20].

- Regular environmental volunteering produces significant improvements in cardiovascular fitness.[21]

- Natural spaces benefit well-being; the human response to nature includes feelings of contentment and a reduction in stress.[22]

- Exercise in green space leads to reduced depression and improved self-esteem and mood.[23] Green Gym participants who joined with the poorest mental health were three times more likely to be the ones improving the most.[24]

- Access to a greener environment is found to benefit well-being[25] promote higher levels of physical activity[26] and improve mental health.

- Participation in a range of green exercise activities leads to significant health and social benefits. Self-esteem levels are significantly improved and feelings of anger, confusion, depression and tension all significantly improve post-activity.[27,28]

- Conservation groups help build the social capital of local communities. Many studies show that involvement in conservation group activities increases social networking and a sense of belonging.[29,30,31]

- Populations living in greener environments have lower levels of income related health inequality.[32]

- Australian researchers found that members of land conservation groups experience higher levels of health and well-being than non-members. The positive health benefits derived from participating in conservation activities include improvements to physical health and general mood and, in addition, to enhanced social capital.[33]

- Small-scale studies have found that contact with nature provides direct health benefits for conditions including attention hyperactivity disorder and depression.[34]

- A Swedish study found that lack of access to green areas in urban environments was linked to stress-related symptoms and annoyance caused by environmental noise.[35]

- A recent study in the Ljubljana Green System in Slovenia emphasised the importance of 'place attachment' – related to the feelings that people attach to green areas – in human emotional well-being and social cohesion.[36] Cultural identity is also deeply rooted in the biological environment.

Nature and education benefits – the evidence

- Research by the Sustainable Development Commission[37] and by Thomas and Thomson[38] shows that environmental quality and young people's well-being are inextricably linked. Young people's everyday experience of living and learning in the environment, and the health of the environment itself, are critical to overall well-being.

- Improving the quality of the school environment enhances young people's physical and mental health and safety, and their overall development, learning, enjoyment and behaviour

- Research for the NASUWT[39] shows that the quality of the physical environment surrounding the school affects behaviour within schools, as well as attendance and academic achievement. Thomas and Thomson found that the worse a local environment looks, the less children are able to play freely and develop the habits and commitments that will enable them to address environmental problems in the future.[40]

- The *Learn to Lead* charity found the natural environment to be a key resource for kids to change things. Some work by Cambridge University describes the impact of that.[41]

- The Good Childhood Enquiry found strong evidence that young people want a better school environment.[42]

- In research for Farming and Countryside Education, Malone found strong evidence from across the world that when young people engage in explorative play and experiential learning activities their lives can be changed positively, with improvements in attention and achievement, physical and mental health, social interaction and personal concept/esteem.[43]

- Malone also found that outdoor learning enhanced young people's environmental responsibility and their resilience to changes in their environment.[44] International research by Bell and Dyment[45] and Blair[46] provides strong evidence to show that activities in school grounds including gardening, habitat restoration and tree planting contribute to young people's learning, environmental awareness, social behaviour and relationships.

- Evidence of impact of sustainable schools further shows that, if grounds are designed and used with a view to improving the quality of children's play and learning experiences, benefits accrue for young people's physical, mental, social and spiritual well-being, therefore contributing to healthy schools initiatives.

Source: Evidence of impact of sustainable schools. Dept. for Children, Schools and Families

Nature and social inclusion benefits – the evidence

- 'Education and training programmes for offenders increase the likelihood of sustainable employment and reduce re-offending on release. A range of BTCV's programmes with offenders show a 39 per cent success rate in supporting offenders through training and into employment.' [47]

- 'A high-quality public environment can have a significant impact on the economic life of urban centres; companies are attracted to locations that offer well-designed, well-managed public places and these in turn attract customers, employees and services. A good public landscape also offers very clear benefits to the local economy in terms of stimulating increased house prices, since house-buyers are willing to pay to be near green space.'[48]

- '… graffiti, abandoned buildings, vandalism, street litter, lack of recreation facilities and green spaces, and noise are seen as significant predictors of distress, well-being and chronic and depressive symptoms in neighbourhoods.'[49]

- 'Incorporating green spaces into urban planning combines opportunities for conserving biodiversity with health benefits to the population. Further research would help characterise the nature of the links that tie human well-being to biodiversity within the urban environment.'[50]

Economic benefits and costs – the evidence

- Re-offending in England and Wales costs the Treasury over £11 billion a year.[51]

- A six-week spell in prison costs £4500 – £300 more than a highly intensive two-year community order involving unpaid work and rehabilitation schemes.[52]

- A re-offending ex-prisoner is likely to be responsible for crime costing the criminal justice system an average of £65,000.[53]

- Physical inactivity and obesity are risk factors for chronic conditions such as heart disease, with the cost of inactivity in England estimated at £8.2 billion.[54]

- In the UK, mental ill health costs £23.1 billion to the economy.[55]

- The cost of global biodiversity decline under a business-as-usual scenario is estimated to be as much as €14 trillion by 2050 (7 per cent of predicted global GDP in 2050).[56]

Policy priorities

Well-being is a key part the work of third sector organisations irrespective of the sector in which they work. Well-being is integral to advocacy work, the way arguments are framed when responding to public consultations, and input in key policy processes.

The Public Health White Paper[57] and the Natural Environment White Paper[58] are two of the policy documents most cited by all interviewees. Both illustrate how policy is increasingly capturing the benefits of the natural environment – Public Health White Paper and Mental Health Strategy[59] includes relevant references to green spaces – and provides strategic intervention points for NGOs to advance the nature and well-being agenda through the implementation of health and well-being boards and local nature partnerships.

Other key policy documents and processes referred to by most organisations include the Localism Bill, the UK government's Mental Health Strategy and Education policies and the national curriculum. There were also a few references to Energy and Transport, although these were in a minority.

All nature conservation organisations mentioned the reform of the National Planning Policy Framework and the review of environmental regulation (the Red Tape Challenge) as two key areas which have required lots of attention and a significant investment of staff resources and campaigns during 2011 and early 2012.

Overall there is a perception that policy is shifting, but not far enough. Many government documents capture and refer to the benefits of the natural environment but they are not serious enough about implementing the right policies and measures. The system – particularly but not exclusively in the health sector – is geared towards curing/correcting rather than preventing, and some professions (e.g. GPs) and government departments still see 'nature-based solutions' as a soft option.

The economic valuation of benefits and impacts resulting from the natural environment are seen as critical in informing policy-making (i.e. keeping this green space saves me this much in mental health costs), which further emphasises the interest and increasing attention third sector organisations give to the hard-to-measure things. Yet there is also a word of caution about putting a price on everything and the risk to present those benefits from the perspective

"Health and well-being boards are key to decide how, if, and what role nature plays in delivering health benefits."

"There are lots of opportunities to use the environment for public benefit but not enough is being done."

"The evidence is starting to get through from the top to the bottom".

"The government is in a 'not listening' mode."

of individualistic benefit rather than a common one as clearly described in the *Common Cause*[60] report.

There was a shared view that while exercising influence at national level is a priority, the current context makes it increasingly difficult and that action is likely to be more effectively targeted at local level. There is a perception that government action is leading towards greater control, competences, and decision-making power by local authorities and communities. For example, the Localism Bill gives communities the right to buy land and to challenge decisions by local authorities. However, it is important to acknowledge that this trend could slow and reverse, and that in some instances the extent to which the government has empowered local decision-makers has been exaggerated, such as in education policy.

While it remains to be seen how much this will translate into practice, and acknowledging the risk that central government withdraws its support and commitment, it is likely that communities will have the opportunity to take more control over certain areas (health, protection of environment, etc) if they wish to.

The creation of health and well-being boards – following from the Public Health Bill – which will bring together health services, local government, local NGOs, businesses and people, will be key to decide the role that nature plays in delivering health benefits.

Similarly the establishment of local nature partnerships – following from the Natural Environment White Paper – will provide a platform for local organisations, businesses and authorities to think and argue about why they want to protect specific green spaces. It is likely that in this context, social benefits and value will count at least as much as environmental benefits, if not more.

Both processes open the door for the involvement of local stakeholders to protect green spaces, but this will need to be accompanied with a minimum level of funding to ensure it is effective and realises the full potential of the natural environment.

Most of the organisations interviewed are active at local level where they are working cooperatively with a diverse range of organisations; this is possibly where some of the most innovative and effective partnerships are being developed. Age UK and Friends of the Earth are just an example of organisations joining forces to influence local government policy to improve neighborhoods and make them both greener and more age-friendly.

Most organisations interviewed referred to the health and well-being boards and local nature partnerships as strategic opportunities and key areas of intervention to advance the nature well-being agenda.

Views from respondents

- We've gone a long way over past years but still have lots to do. Language is changing; but we are still far from real and meaningful action, practice and funding.

- Different views emerge with regard to levels of awareness by policy-makers: 'Politicians can't say they are not aware anymore' vs 'Few politicians aware of evidence'. Need to put the existing evidence in front of them.

- There is agreement that opportunities are being missed at policy level to deliver 'more for less' and by NGOs to make a stronger and more effective case for policy change.

- There is a shift from national to local power but it is not clear to what extent. This means more action at local level.

- Barriers to progress (integrating natural environment into key policies) most cited include:

"The Department of Health has not given this field the profile it requires. Research is coming from NGOs such as the RSPB and others rather than from government departments; it's good research but it does not get taken as seriously as if it was Government publishing it"

"We need to work better together but the coalition government has caused lots of work for NGOs; it has put us on the defensive and reduced our capacity to engage. Yet unless we find ways of working together, we'll fail to deliver the change we want to see."

"The natural environment is becoming more visible on public health – possibly the area where there are more advances but still far from full potential."

- Silo approach – government departments not talking to each other.

- System geared towards curing rather than preventing.

- Government is not in a listening mode – need to find alternative ways/ targets.

- Most cited opportunities to drive change and for joined action:

  - Health and well-being boards

  - Local nature partnerships

  - National Planning Policy Framework

Working together

All the organisations consulted through this report recognise the benefits and potential of collaboration. For most of them working together in partnership is at the core of their organisation.

Partnership, strategic coordination and information sharing is more common among organisations of the same sector (e.g. mental health, nature conservation) than between sectors. Yet there are several examples of partnerships and initiatives bringing together organisations with different

"It is essential that we frame things in a positive way. We need to provide a positive vision."

backgrounds and missions. Most of these occur at local level or for particular projects as illustrated in case studies included in this section.

In spite of this, there was wide agreement that the commonalities and synergies between different organisations are not being fully exploited; at the moment there is not any initiative that fulfils this role.

Working more effectively with other organisations is seen as a key priority in order to 'survive-succeed' in what is an increasingly challenging context for third sector organisations due to lack of funding; this challenging context, however, is one of the reasons preventing organisation from reaching out to new partners and sectors as they concentrate on their core activities. This was further emphasised by the fact that at the time of writing many organisations were 'on the defensive', investing most of their efforts in the consultation on the National Planning Policy Framework and the Red Tape Challenge.

Awareness of the potential of the natural environment to deliver key goals is high within organisations from different sectors (e.g. health, education, nature conservation) and several of them are putting this into practice as illustrated throughout the report. Yet it is worth highlighting that there are very few organisations in non-conservation sectors actively campaigning for a better environment. Some, like MacMillan and the British Heart Foundation, recognise that it would make sense for them to do so but it is actually not happening and they are still far from integrating it into their strategies.

"We need a forum that brings together organisations from health, education, nature conservation and other sectors."

"I do not see any reason why health organisations like ours should not campaign for a better environment."

Views from respondents

- Coordination exists at different levels within sectors. Nature conservation organisations work together and join forces regularly and the same can be said for the education and health sectors.

- There are examples of innovative partnerships and organisations reaching out to organisations from different sectors. These are more common at local level than at national level.

- With some exceptions, it is not easy to 'engage' health organisations in this agenda. Progress has been made but there is long way to go before the natural environment becomes integrated in their strategy.

- There are – or have been - a few coalitions and forums bringing together different actors (Outdoor Health Forum, Sustainable Schools Alliance, Natural Connections Alliance) mainly from two sectors. There is no platform to bring together organisations from multiple sectors.

- There is a willingness to cooperate and an acknowledgement that it is badly needed given the challenges we face; this does not happen because of the lack of time and resources to engage in non-core activities.

- The 'greenest government ever' has put organisations on the defensive focusing on their core goals and diminishing their capacity to develop innovative alliances. But unless these alliances are developed, it will be difficult to reverse the current situation.

- There is a positive reaction to the idea of setting up a platform/network to make the most of existing evidence and synergies.

- There is no clarity on characteristics or the best way to do so, but there is broad agreement that this will not happen spontaneously by bringing organisations together. It requires a minimum infrastructure that provides leadership, coordination and stability.

"Now is the time for nature conservation organisations to work with health and education organisations and vice-versa."

"A coalition and forum that brings together organisations looking at maximising the role of the natural environment in delivering common goals is badly needed."

"We need creative solutions and innovative partnerships to show government the potential of the natural environment."

3. Recommendations going forward

In order to advance the nature and well-being agenda, we recommend action in three main areas:

- **Encourage information sharing and strategic coordination** among organisations through the establishment of a network or common platform.

- **Make the most of existing evidence and practice** by packaging it in an accessible and user-friendly format with a goal to:

  - raise awareness among decision-makers

  - inform key organisations not fully engaged in this agenda

  - input advocacy work into key policy process and policy.

- **Strengthen evidence,** in particular on the socio-economic benefits of the natural environment and links between nature and pro-environmental behaviour.

Our research findings suggest there is a favourable context to bring together a wide range of organisations to translate existing synergies into a louder and more effective voice for a healthier natural environment. A necessary first step would be to set up a platform/network as a common resource to support those organisations sharing a common interest in a healthy natural environment to make a stronger case to decision-makers and mainstream their work across the UK.

While the research did not go as far as defining the characteristics of such a platform, the workshop provided an opportunity to identify the key requirements to ensure the success of the initiative and possible next steps.

In terms of requirements for success, it is important that partners see that the initiative:

- is useful to them (i.e. gaining something out of it – learning about other people's work, increased effectiveness, higher impact)

- is aligned with their goals and objectives

- requires a level of commitment that is realistic

- does not have a huge cost in terms of money and time

- has the potential to make a difference

- has a minimum infrastructure to make things happen (e.g. staff, funding, etc.).

In terms of next steps to take this idea forward, a suggested approach would be to invite organisations to work on a joint project (e.g. a manifesto, a report) and from there build towards a more formalised relationship which could take the form of a network, platform or coalition. Focusing on a specific project helps create space for information sharing and provides a fertile ground from which other ideas and action will emerge.

Case studies and examples

Strengthening the evidence - making the policy case

- Ecotherapy - Mind

- Essex University study – BTCV Cymru

- Greener Living Learning – WWF-UK and BTCV

- Green Impacts – BTCV

- Leading for the future – Commonwork and WWF-UK

- Natural Health – RSPB

- Nature and mental health benefits – Mind

- Nature, Well-being and Health – Science for Environmental Policy

- Sustainable schools – Department of Children Schools and Families

- Well-being comes naturally – BTCV

Nature and well-being in practice

- Change one thing and Pride of Place – Age UK

- Ecominds – Mind

- Green exercise – Natural England

- Let Nature Feed your Senses – LEAF and the Sensory Trust

- London Orchard Project

- Natural Change – WWF Scotland

- Natural Childhood – National Trust

- Natural Connections – Natural England

- Our Natural Health Service – Natural England

- Plant! (Peckham Learning and Nature Team) and Budding Together – London Wildlife Trust

- Real World Learning at Rainham Marshes – RSPB

- The Sustainable Schools Alliance

- VisitWoods – Woodland Trust

- Walking for health – The Ramblers, MacMillan, Natural England.

- Young London Leaders – National Children's Bureau (NCB) and London Sustainable Development Commission (LSDC).

Strengthening the evidence – making the policy case

Ecotherapy: the green agenda for mental health[62]

In this report Mind calls for a new green agenda for mental health which places ecotherapy at the centre of mental health policy. The report gives an overview of the evidence for the therapeutic role of green exercise; describes results of research confirming that green exercise improves mental health and well-being; and sets out the policy implications.

Ecotherapy is defined as a natural, free and accessible treatment that boosts mental well-being. Whether it is a horticultural development programme supervised by a therapist or a simple walk in the park, being outdoors and being active is proven to benefit mental health.

Ecotherapy is presented as a clinically valid option that can play a vital part in patients' recovery and an alternative to antidepressants in a context where the cost and prescribing of drugs continues to rise, and where 93 per cent of GPs say they have prescribed antidepressants against their better judgement owing to a lack of alternatives. Ecotherapy is an accessible, cost-effective and natural addition to existing treatment options.

Ecotherapy would contribute to three of the government's six key priorities set out in its Public Health White Paper: increase exercise, improve mental health and reduce obesity. The report provides evidence of studies confirming that participating in green exercise activities provides substantial benefits for health and well-being. Ecotherapy could contribute to reducing the £338 million that antidepressant prescription costs the public health service.

In spite of this evidence, ecotherapy is still not widely regarded as a serious treatment option. One of the barriers for this is that GPs have few options to refer their patients to a local conservation project or rambling group as a treatment option for people with depression. Care plans or social care assessments do not generally consider providing support to access green space.

The benefits of green spaces need to be considered during the planning of urban and rural space, the design of hospitals, the treatment and care of people experiencing mental distress, and the identification of public health and social care priorities.

Extracted and adapted from: Mind (2007) *Ecotherapy: the green agenda for mental health* http://www.mind.org.uk/

Essex University study – BTCV Cymru[61]

A study involving 403 volunteers from 28 BTCV groups looked at the impact of environmental volunteering on behaviours and attitudes to the environment showing that:

- A positive relationship exists between connectedness to nature and adoption of environmentally friendly behaviours.

- Participating in conservation volunteering activities not only reconnects people to nature but also positively influences the environmental attitudes and behaviours of individuals, due to a range of motivators which provide the catalyst for change.

Greener Living Learning – WWF-UK and BTCV[63]

The Greener Living Learning project delivered by BTCV in partnership with WWF-UK had a goal to study the role of informal learning in enabling change towards more sustainable lifestyles and to identify what practical steps conservation volunteer groups, community food growing and other members of BTCV's Community Network could take to reduce the impacts on the areas that they manage.

The programme ran from December 2009 to March 2010 in BTCV projects in Kent, Hampshire and East Sussex. The programme used a combination of events, visits and coffee-time activities with existing conservation groups to provide informal learning opportunities and encourage behaviour change. WWF-UK and CAG Consultants Ltd's *Change!* tool was used to measure impacts on behavioural change resulting from the learning process.

Impact measurements tracked changes in car use, air travel, food buying, and food growing; it showed that positive change towards sustainable lifestyles had taken place. The study revealed the potential to change behaviour through informal learning, even in groups where limited change seems possible and on a very short timescale.

The project was funded by the Learning Revolution Fund, as part of the Transformation Fund, a funding stream that emerged from The Learning Revolution White Paper, published in 2009 with a goal to support informal adult learning (i.e. learning for pleasure, self-development and community development).

Extracted and adapted from: www.greenerlivinglearning.org.uk

Green Impacts – BTCV[64]

BTCV is leading the sector in terms of measuring the outputs of conservation volunteering. Its Management Information System (MIS) provides an incomparable amount of quantitative data evidencing how its activities have a positive impact on people's health. The MIS has been fully operational for five years, so it holds a vast amount of statistical data, with 750,000 volunteer records, 50,000 of which are highly detailed. What really sets it apart from other tools is the emphasis on activity. Thousands of MIS volunteer records lie dormant for much of the time, but when a volunteer does something, the MIS records and correlates it with the previous volunteering activity of that person. This has shifted volunteer measurement from a static record of volunteers to a dynamic record of volunteer activity.

The Green Impacts project aims to further develop the capacity of the MIS to measure a wider range of impacts such as changes in people's confidence, well-being, employability and environmental behaviour.

Green Impacts will be working with communities across London over three years to identify how people change the way they behave towards the environment through conservation volunteering with BTCV. Workshops, visits to projects and training events will help individuals and groups to identify goals in relation to their personal transport, home, food waste, and water consumption to improve community resilience.

The project will also capture the wider environmental impact of people taking part in environmental volunteering. This will demonstrate if participation in conservation volunteering leads to increased pro-environmental behaviour, such as recycling or cycling to work. Outputs of this project could have policy implications and be relevant to a wide range of groups and organisations engaging people and communities in conservation activities.

The project tests the belief that community resilience can be enhanced by individual participation in group environmental action. If you take part in one green volunteer project you are more likely to act greener in other areas of your life and to volunteer within your community.

Source: The Conservation Volunteers

Leading for the Future – Commonwork and WWF-UK[65]

Leading for the Future (LfF) was designed, developed, and delivered by Commonwork, David Dixon, head teacher, and WWF-UK with the purpose of exploring how to engage and encourage school leaders in sustainability. LfF also offered an opportunity to explore whether a combination of experiential learning, hosted space, deep reflection on values and interconnections with oneself, between others and the natural world could inspire and create leaders in sustainability.

Underpinning this project is the rationale that school leaders can only engage with a sustainability agenda if their personal values are awakened and the hope that engagement in and exploration of the natural environment will lead to transformational change within leaders and within the wider education systems.

The project brought teaching practitioners in primary schools, head teachers and staff with different levels of responsibility to take part in a four-day residential training followed-up with a one-day workshop six weeks later. The LfF programme was structured to inspire and stimulate deep reflection through a mixture of activities involving the head (cognitive), heart (emotional/spiritual), and hands (physical).

The training took place at Bore Place in Kent, which includes a residential learning centre, an organic dairy farm, vegetable and fruit gardens, and fields and woodland. This setting provided a nurturing, creative learning space and offered participants a hosted space in which to reflect and explore their own journeys towards sustainability.

The results show that all participants experienced the programme as transformative and empowering, leading some to change their practice with students, colleagues and systems. Participants experienced a strong reawakening of their core values and have been inspired to take action within their professional practice.

Extracted and adapted from: Leading for the Future; Commonwork and WWF-UK.

Natural Health – RSPB

Two reports for the RSPB by Dr William Bird, *Natural Fit* and *Natural Thinking*, analyse the evidence linking physical and mental health to the natural environment.

Public health problems present chronic and expensive challenges to the UK; each year physical inactivity costs us over £8 billion, and the total cost of mental healthcare in England is £41.8 billion. Both these figures include substantial costs in the care sector (to the NHS, local authorities, privately funded services, family and friends) and in the economy, caused by people being unable to work.

The link between our natural environment and public health has long been recognised, and was a factor in the establishment of both urban parks and the National Parks. However, today's policy culture requires evidence to justify such connections. While research provides consistent clues to a positive link between nature and health, this is seldom reflected in health care or education policies, planning guidelines or economic strategies.

About 60% of the UK's population is physically inactive. Obesity, a major symptom of inactivity, is growing rapidly, affecting over 20% of the population, including 16% of children. *Natural Fit* outlines the benefits for the NHS and society from physical activity. Regular moderate physical activity reduces the risk of heart disease, diabetes, strokes, cancers, disability, osteoporosis, depression, anxiety and sleep problems. It is also a vital component in preventing and reducing obesity.

Natural Thinking shows in detail how natural green space can lift our spirits and reduce mental health problems:

- nature reduces stress within minutes of contact

- patients undergoing operations and tests in hospital need fewer painkillers if exposed to views of nature

- nature can reduce violent behaviour due to its restorative effect on the part of the brain that helps reduce irritability

- elderly people who have close access to a place where they can relax and enjoy nature show significantly greater satisfaction with where they live.

Some of the strongest findings relate to children's interaction with nature:

- contact with nature improves children's concentration and self-discipline, but children have less contact with nature now than at any time in the past

- playing in a natural environment improves children's social, mental and physical development

- the behavioural symptoms of children with attention deficit disorder (ADHD) are reduced when children play in a natural environment

- children use the natural environment to recover from stress and this helps to reduce mental health disorders.

The costs of obesity and physical inactivity

Obesity and physical inactivity are the greatest public health challenges for the UK government. There are significant costs associated with treating their effects on the population.

- Obesity and physical inactivity cost England £2.5 billion and £8.2 billion respectively. Increasing access to the natural environment can play a vital role in efforts to increase activity and reduce obesity.

- One in four people each year will visit a doctor because of a mental health problem. Being more active and having more contact with the outdoors reduces stress and can prevent and reduce depression and anxiety. The NHS spent £6.5 billion on mental illness in 2002/03. Local authorities spent £1.4 billion and informal carers contribute an equivalent of £3.9 billion.

- Seven in ten people do not take enough exercise to benefit their health as recommended by the Chief Medical Officer. Engagement in physical activity reduces the risk of up to 20 chronic diseases and disorders including obesity, heart disease, Type 2 diabetes and certain cancers.

- Obesity levels for children aged six have doubled in the last ten years, and have tripled in those aged fifteen. 22 per cent of adults are obese and about 40 per cent are overweight. Being overweight or obese accounts for as much as 30 per cent of heart disease and 80 per cent of diabetes, and costs the UK £2.5 billion a year.

Source: Natural Fit (2004), RSPB and *Natural Thinking* (2005), RSPB. http://www.rspb.org.uk/ourwork/policy/health/index.aspx

Nature and mental health benefits – Mind[66,67]

Mind has carried out its own research to see what benefits green exercise has on well-being. A survey of over 100 people taking part in green exercise activities – which included gardening, walking groups, conservation work, running and cycling groups – showed that:

- 90 per cent of people who took part in green exercise activities said that the combination of nature and exercise is most important in determining how they feel

- 94 per cent of people commented that green exercise improves their mental health

- 90 per cent of people commented that taking part in green exercise activities benefits their physical health.

A comparison of twenty people in two contrasting walks, one inside and the other outdoors in a natural setting, found that:

- 90 per cent of people reported an increase in self-esteem after an outdoor walk versus 17 per cent indoors.

- 71 per cent of people experienced a decrease in the levels of depression after an outdoor walk versus 45 per cent indoors.

- 71 per cent of people stated they felt less tense after an outdoor walk versus 28 per cent indoors.

Extracted and adapted from: www.mind.org.uk and Mind (2007) *Ecotherapy: The green agenda for mental health.* Mind: London.

Nature, human well-being and health – Science for Environmental policy[68]

Some experts argue that because people are inseparable from their living environments, human well-being is closely tied to changes in the environment. Small-scale studies have found that contact with nature provides direct health benefits for conditions including attention hyperactivity disorder and depression.[69] For example, a Swedish study found that lack of access to green areas in urban environments was linked to stress-related symptoms and annoyance caused by environmental noise.[70] More evidence is needed to determine the exact nature of the interaction between biodiversity and mental health but, even if the effects are small, activities such as walking or playing in green spaces may be attractive care options because of the low safety risks and economic costs, as compared to medical treatments.

Source: Science for Environmental Policy; Future Brief: Biodiversity and Health – October 2011.

Sustainable Schools – Department of Education[71]

This report summarises existing evidence and experiences in relation to engaging young people with sustainability. There is reference to various pieces of evidence showing how embedding sustainability within the school (installations, teaching, etc.) improves learning and adoption of sustainable behaviours. The role of the natural environment is mentioned as one of the various factors that contribute to this.

Some pieces of evidence quoted in this report include:

- 'Percy-Smith's (2009) research in six schools with an interest in sustainability demonstrates that practical and experiential learning, such as active engagement in the school garden, enables young people to act on their learning in respect of sustainable lifestyles.'[72]

- 'In the USA, Duffin *et al.* (2004) found that educational programmes relating to the local community and environment improved young people's attachment to place, civic engagement and environmental stewardship.'[73]

- 'International research shows that experiential learning with community organisations, for example on conservation projects, can impact positively on young people's engagement and learning, including improvements in environmental behaviour, community awareness and relationships between community members, young people and schools. See, for example, Schneller (2008); Bogner (1999); Powers (2004).[74,75,76]

Source: Sustainable Schools Evidence (DfE)

Well-being Comes Naturally Project – BTCV[77]

Well-being Comes Naturally project is a £250,000 Ecominds project run by BTCV that provides a range of outdoor projects and environmental activities for people who suffer from mental distress across England. BTCV helps to connect people with their natural world, so they can get involved in more meaningful volunteering activities, develop their skills and take on more responsibility.

In 28 locations across England, BTCV and partner community groups are encouraging people who experience mental distress to get involved in and become a part of their local environmental group.

The groups are diverse and offer a wide range of activities: food growing as part of a thriving allotment group, preserving precious habitats through biodiversity action teams, heritage preservation through 'Friends of' groups, and many others.

Over the two years, BTCV wants 450 people to join thriving BTCV and community groups to take on roles of responsibility and get involved in the group's organisation or management.

In this way, the participants reconnect with nature, become more confident and happy as they build their skills and social network and become an integral part of the group – helping to lead and organise where they are interested.

Extracted and adapted from: www.tcv.org.uk and www.mind.org.uk
Videos related to this project are available at: http://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLBBC9774C9238EF0A&feature=plcp

Change One Thing and Pride of Place – Age UK

Age UK has been campaigning for better neighbourhoods for everyone in late life. Age friendly neighbourhoods are communities that offer a good quality of life to all generations. That means accessible and inclusive design; environments which are aesthetically pleasing, safe and easy to inhabit; good local services, facilities and open spaces; a strong social and civic fabric, with opportunities to take part and have a voice; and a real sense of local identity and place.

For many older people, lack of good quality support and infrastructure within the neighbourhoods acts as a barrier that prevents them from being active locally. Places to meet and opportunities to participate – whether it be a public park, a shared community centre or a village hall – are vitally important to all ages. It is important to take into account the needs of people in later life when planning and maintaining public spaces. For instance, having somewhere to rest means that older people can remain mobile for longer in their communities and that they can enjoy public spaces. Similarly, in a survey 52 per cent of respondents agreed that the lack of public toilets in their area stopped them from going out as often as they would like.

Age UK's Change One Thing campaign supported groups of older people, their families, friends and carers around the country to run specific local campaigns on issues they have identified as priorities in their local neighbourhood. It's all about the practical things that can make the difference between being stuck at home and being able to get out and about in the local area. Age UK supported older people to take action on local problems such as fixing pavements and local transport.

Age UK's Pride of Place campaign signed up 200 councillors as Pride of Place 'advocates', which meant they were committed to improving neighbourhoods for older people within their ward or division. At a neighbourhood level all ward councillors have the opportunity to improve places for older people. As ward representatives, councillors have both the electoral mandate and the local knowledge to bring about positive change. This role can go much wider than any formal responsibilities or portfolio they may have within the council to cement the strong link between the councillor and their older electors.

Sources: Change One Thing http://www.ageuk.org.uk/get-involved/campaign/better-neighbourhoods-pride-of-place/change-one-thing/
Pride of Place http://www.ageuk.org.uk/get-involved/campaign/better-neighbourhoods-pride-of-place/advocates/

Ecominds – Mind[78]

As a Big Lottery Fund (BIG) award partner, Mind has distributed £7.5m of lottery money to environmental projects in England through its Ecominds scheme. The scheme is part of BIG's Changing Spaces programme, which was launched in 2005 to help communities enjoy and improve their local environments. With four other award partners, the programme funds a range of activities from local food schemes and farmers markets to education projects teaching people about the environment.

Ecominds has funded 130 environmental projects in England to deliver a number of key outcomes:

- increase access to the natural environment, thereby improving people's mental and physical well-being

- create community spaces and improved local environments

- bring people together to challenge stigma and discrimination against those with mental health problems.

Ecominds' projects provide a range of outdoor green activities for people with mental health problems as a way to improve confidence, self-esteem, and physical and mental health. Projects aim to break down barriers and combat mental health discrimination by improving links between participants and the local community. Interaction with other local volunteers can provide valuable opportunities to share personal experiences and widen social networks.

Typical Ecominds projects/activities include:

- community horticultural and agricultural work

- walking and rambling groups

- wildlife habitat or other site creation or renovation

- clearing open spaces for community use

- environmental protection

- creating or renovating urban green areas

- installing signposts to encourage community environmental awareness

- recycling projects, such as furniture, glass, and white goods

- community agricultural projects linking gardeners and producers with local selling opportunities

- producing artwork in public places and in enclosed spaces

- learning new environmental skills.

Projects range from those open to all, to others which require telephone enquiries and referrals from GPs. A map and information for all projects is available at the Mind website: http://www.mind.org.uk/ecominds_map

Information extracted from: www.mind.org.uk

Green Exercise – Natural England

Natural England funded eight demonstration Green Exercise projects through local partnerships around the regions. Their main aim was to increase levels of physical activity and people's connections to their local green spaces. At the heart of Green Exercise is the concept of biophilia, which literally means 'love of life or living systems'. Put simply, nature makes us feel good.

To explore the effectiveness of Green Exercise, Natural England funded a three-year pilot programme from 2007 to 2010. Eight demonstration projects were set up across eight different regions of England. These projects work closely with local partners such as PCTs, local government and charities.

Each Green Exercise project produced at least one case story to highlight an area of success. Each project was evaluated to provide examples of good practice that can be promoted to health and leisure professionals as well as decision-makers at a policy level.

More information about the projects is available at: http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20111121072149/http://www.wfh.naturalengland.org.uk/our-work/green-exercise

Let nature feed your senses – LEAF (Linking Environment and Farming) and the Sensory Trust[79]

Let Nature Feed Your Senses is a project funded by the Big Lottery Fund run jointly by the Sensory Trust and LEAF (Linking Environment and Farming) with the aim of engaging with people who have a disability, live in areas of high deprivation, are over 65 (particularly those in Care Homes), and schoolchildren who have a disability and/or live in deprived areas without the opportunity to visit farms or wildlife areas.

The project provides opportunities for participants to stimulate their abilities and helps them to overcome some of their disadvantages through an appreciation of the natural world, a greater awareness of the sources of food and the greater well-being provided by wildlife.

Source: http://www.letnaturefeedyoursenses.org/letnature/home/project.eb

London Orchard Project[80]

The London Orchard Project promotes orchards in London. Around 23 currently exist and 65 are planned. The project started with a food security goal but since then has expanded to deliver social objectives like community cohesion, resilience and ownership.

Orchards help bring communities together and are an effective way of reaching out to communities that are sometimes isolated. They can be used in multiple ways and their products provide an opportunity for further community activities (e.g. apple cakes, cider fairs, gardening).

The designation of orchards as a National Priority Habitat as part of UK's Biodiversity Action Plan has been a key driver for the project, helping to make the case to several Local Authorities. The project acts as a catalyst; local community groups lead the orchard development, find the place, etc. It is a very attractive project which is on the radar of several organisations and government bodies (e.g. case study used as evidence for DCLG) because it ticks several boxes (food security, healthy living and lifestyles, community, biodiversity, etc). It works in partnership with the Wildlife Trusts and Sustain among others and it has had an impact on London Government bodies (Mayor of London).

Source: www.thelondonorchardproject.org

Natural Change – WWF Scotland

The Natural Change is a WWF Scotland project that works with influential individuals to build their capacity to be sustainability leaders. The project is based on an Ecopsychology approach and is underpinned by the principle that to lead change, one must first change oneself.

To date two groups have participated in the project – one drawn from professional communicators and one drawn from the formal education systems. Both groups participated in a series of residential 'wilderness' workshops, meetings and mentoring activities over the course of twelve months.

One year on from the end of the second project, participants are still active sustainability leaders and involved in ministerial advisory groups, changing national policy and organisational change.

More information is available at www.naturalchange.org.uk

Source: www.wwf.org.uk

Natural Childhood Project – National Trust

In 2010, the National Trust ran the Outdoor Nation debate, which saw their roaming reporter Leni Hatcher asking people if they felt that we are losing touch with the outdoors and, if so, if that mattered. As a result of the resoundingly affirmative answers to both questions, the Trust took the following action:

1. They worked with the BritDoc Foundation, dairy brand Arla and the NHS Sustainable Development Unit to find filmmakers Green Lions, who will be producing a feature length documentary exploring children's contemporary relationship with nature.

2. They commissioned naturalist, broadcaster and writer Stephen Moss, to write a report building on the results of the Outdoor Nation project, gathering together all the current thinking on and research into the disconnection of children from nature.

The Natural Childhood report was published in March 2012 as an inquiry and sent to leading experts, organisations and policy-makers to ask their views on how we might reconnect children with nature. The results were used to develop a draft roadmap of interventions needed to reconnect children and nature.

This draft roadmap was presented at a summit event on the 25 September 2012 in London, bringing together experts and interested parties to build consensus around action needed to give every child the opportunity to form a personal connection with the natural world.

Following the summit, the Trust is working with a range of partners to develop a campaign for change. They are currently working with dairy brand Arla and Play England, and are keen to engage a wide range of organisations and brands to develop a truly collaborative campaign similar to Eat Seasonably or End of the Line.

The film will be the vehicle for launching the campaign and will premiere at Sheffield Documentary Festival in June 2013.

Source: www.nationaltrust.org.uk/naturalchildhood or www.outdoornation.org.uk

Natural Connections – Natural England[81]

Natural Connections is a new initiative led by Natural England together with the Council for Learning Outside the Classroom and a large consortium of civil society organisations such as the National Trust, RSPB, the Royal Society of Wildlife Trusts, Volunteering England and the English National Parks Authorities Association, which aims to significantly increase the number of school-aged children experiencing the full range of benefits that come from learning in natural environments.

The initiative aims to deliver a large-scale four-year Demonstration Project involving about two hundred schools and 40,000 students, as an effective way to practically test, assess, and evaluate all aspects of the proposed outdoor learning service for schools. The Demonstration Project will target schools that currently provide little or no learning in natural environments – often schools from deprived urban areas – using volunteers to help the community build capacity in their local school, while enabling the school to engage the skills and expertise available in their local community.

Source: www.naturalengland.org.uk/ourwork/enjoying/linkingpeople/learning/naturalconnections/default.aspx

Our Natural Health Service – Natural England

This report provides evidence of the potential of the natural environment to deliver health benefits. It frames the natural environment as a great national resource which is being vastly underused and makes the case for it to be at the centre of the battle to confront diseases of twenty-first century living like diabetes, obesity and depression.

England's natural green space – public parks, woodlands, countryside and even tree-lined streets – provides an opportunity to improve health and reduce rates of twenty-first century diseases. Used in the right way, it represents our Natural Health Service – a treatment which is cost effective and free at the point of delivery.

The campaign is based on the rationale that in order to reap the benefits that the natural environment can provide for our health we need to uphold two new principles: firstly, that good quality green space needs to be equally available to everyone; and secondly that health professionals should embrace the use of the natural environment in preventing diseases of twenty-first century living.

Natural England's Natural Health Service campaign aims to:

- increase the number of households that are within five minutes walk of an area of green space of at least two hectares

- enable every GP or community nurse to be able to signpost patients to an approved health walk or outdoor activity programme.

Some of these targets and programmes have been or are under review following spending cuts.

Source: http://www.naturalengland.org.uk/Images/nhsmanifesto_tcm6-12022.pdf

Plant! (Peckham Learning and Nature Team) and Budding Together – London Wildlife Trust[82]

PLANT! is a project based at the London Wildlife Trust Centre for Wildlife Gardening (CWG), located behind a quiet residential street in Peckham. It provides a series of three-month placements of environmental activities. The aim is to reach 24 adults suffering mental distress, with particular emphasis on those from local BME communities.

Participants can engage in a range of activities based on their interests and physical ability, including:

- garden maintenance: compost making, clearing, digging, sowing seeds, nurturing and harvesting vegetables and other plants

- practical conservation work and environmental activities at other local green spaces: tree planting, wildlife identification and nature walks

- environmental and cultural-based arts activities which provide a creative outlet, as well as regular themed events to raise awareness amongst the wider community.

The Budding Together Project provides opportunities for adults in London to become involved in Wildlife and Environmental Conservation Activities at Camley Street Natural Park and also a selection of other natural spaces across North and Central London.

Volunteers have the opportunity to develop their skills in a range of practical conservation and horticultural tasks, as well as undertaking species surveying activities and contributing to the protection of the capital's wild spaces.

Although informal and not accredited, the project follows an NVQ structure to give participants an opportunity to get a taste of following an accredited course of study. It is hoped that this encourages them to progress within the lifetime of the project or take a new route at the completion of the project.

The project encourages more experienced volunteers to mentor others, sharing their skills, knowledge and enthusiasm. Volunteers are encouraged, within the Budding Together Project, to get involved within other London Wildlife Trust (LWT) programmes and benefit from the wide range of opportunities available across the capital within LWT projects.

Plant! and Budding Together are Ecominds projects funded by Mind through the Big Lottery Fund.

Sources: http://www.mind.org.uk/help/ecominds/ecominds/funded_projects/large_grants#plant
http://www.mind.org.uk/help/ecominds/ecominds/funded_projects/large_grants#budding

Real World Learning at Rainham Marshes – RSPB

More than 6,000 children and young people enjoy a stimulating connection with nature outdoors every year at RSPB Rainham Marshes in Essex. The site was recently rated 'outstanding' when it was awarded its Quality Badge for Learning Outside the Classroom. Professional RSPB field teachers lead small groups on nature walks and encourage children to get stuck in to such ever-popular activities as pond-dipping and mini-beast hunting. But there's space and time for less structured exploration, play and reflection too. Activities and materials for teachers help them extend the outside experience, so it's not just a one-off but an integrated part of their class's regular programme.

Source: www.rspb.org.uk/teaching; www.sd-commission.org.uk/publications.php?id=972 pages

The Sustainable Schools Alliance[83]

The Sustainable Schools Alliance, launched in March 2011, came about through a collective response by voluntary sector organisations who were concerned about support for schools on sustainability following the change in government policy. The Alliance aims to provide a clear and compelling offer of support to all schools in the country, which will help them to put sustainability at the heart of what they do. The Alliance's Working Group, composed of the National Children's Bureau (NCB) and Sustainability and Environment Education (SEEd), is leading on developing the Alliance (in agreement with partners) because they represent and reach stakeholders across their respective sectors.

They can link agendas around education for sustainable development, development education, and health and well being – enabling sustainability to be considered in a much broader context and encouraging a broader base of supporters. An extensive programme of consultation activities underpins the Alliance involving around 300 individuals and organisations, including an advisory group made up of voluntary sector organisations working with schools and representatives of regional groups supporting sustainable schools. The Alliance does not compete with its members but adds value to their existing work by ensuring the programmes on offer to schools and others are of a high standard, well targeted, and meet the needs of children and young people. The Alliance has been supported to date by Defra, Eco-Schools, Global Action Plan, RSPB, Waste Watch, WWF-UK, and DfE (observer status only). The Alliance has been endorsed by DfE at ministerial level and by Defra through the Natural Environment White Paper.

Source: National Children Bureau (NCB) and www.sustainable-schools-alliance.org.uk

VisitWoods – Woodland Trust

VisitWoods is a partnership project led by the Woodland Trust in partnership with other organisations to help promote visiting woods for all. Partners include Mind, The Stroke Association, Dementia Adventure, The Scout Association and DisabledGo.

VisitWoods offers an online woodland database of the UK's woods which people are welcome to visit. Web visitors can find woods by postcode, town name or the wood name.

The resource lists over 10,000 woods including woods and forests owned by the Woodland Trust, Forestry Commission, National Trust, Wildlife Trusts, RSPB, local authorities and private owners across England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.

The initiative is funded by Natural England through their Access to Nature programme, part of the Big Lottery Fund Changing Spaces Programme and Forestry Commission (England and Scotland), Scottish Natural Heritage and People's Postcode Lottery.

The project has encouraged joint projects with other organisations.

- VisitWoods and Dementia Adventure have launched a project called 'Wandering in the Woods', to help people living with dementia connect with nature.

- With support from Natural England, VisitWoods has worked with social enterprise Autism and Nature to produce a new guide to help 2500 parents and carers of children with autism in Kent to plan and access their local woodland, parks and nature reserves.

Source: visitwoods.org.uk

Walking for Health – Ramblers, MacMillan, Natural England

Walking for Health (WfH) encourages people to become physically active in their local communities. It supports the largest network of health walk schemes across England, offering regular short walks over easy terrain with trained walk leaders. WfH currently supports more than 600 local schemes with over 75,000 participants. The walks make it possible for people to get out and be physically active in their local natural spaces. This brings many benefits for both the individual walkers and their communities. The most important benefits are improved physical and mental health. The Department of Health now recognises health walks as an effective and sustainable way of improving the nation's health.

Walking for Health works at two levels – the national centre and local health walks schemes. The Walking for Health national centre is run by Britain's leading walking charity, Ramblers, in partnership with Macmillan Cancer Support. *Until the end of March 2012, the national centre was run by Natural England.*

The national centre provides resources to support local schemes, including training, insurance, accreditation, national promotion, help and advice. Local health walks schemes are funded and managed locally, and run by a wide variety of different organisations. Many are run by local councils or the NHS but others are run by both local and national voluntary organisations. Local health walks schemes organise and lead the health walks themselves, promote them locally and work to link them up to other local health and well-being initiatives.

Source: http://www.walkingforhealth.org.uk/

Young London Leaders – NCB and Imperial College Open Air Laboratories[84]

The Young London Leaders project aims to harness the collective power of young people to build sustainable communities across London. It includes a focus on increasing marginalised young people's participation in action on sustainable lifestyles and to embed their involvement locally. Young London Leaders is led by the National Children's Bureau (NCB) and is part of the work of the Mayor of London's advisory group, the London Sustainable Development Commission (LSDC).

A Young London Leaders 'satellite' is taking place in the London Borough of Waltham Forest, giving young people the chance to reclaim natural spaces in their community. Working closely with two secondary Pupil Referral Units (PRU), young people are supported in connecting with and understanding more about the natural environment and then leading change in their community that promotes sustainable lifestyles. This provides young people from across the PRU in Waltham Forest with the opportunity to be involved in the different programme activities.

Young London Leaders is partnering with Imperial College and its Open Air Laboratories (OPAL) network of community scientists to develop and run a diverse programme of activities in 2012. Young people participate in a variety of practical activities to develop their understanding of the local environment including roadshows and hands-on surveys. Some of the young people will also take part in leadership development activities to help them find a collective voice in their community and take their ideas to local decision-makers.

Source: National Children Bureau (NCB)

Annex 1. List of organisations and people interviewed

Paul Morling	RSPB
Phil Burfield	RSPB
Helen Meech	National Trust
Ben Stafford	CPRE
Zaria Greenhill	WWF-UK
Birgitta Gatersleben	Surrey University – RESOLVE
Rebekah Phillips	Green Alliance
Eleanor Carter	BTCV
Mick Denness	BTCV
Neil Canham	BTCV (consultant)
Jodie Bettis	Wildlife and Countryside LINK
Bob Bloomfield	Natural History Museum
Gemma Bradshaw	Age UK
Jo Butcher	National Children's Bureau
Rachel Alcock	Ramblers
Kate Damiral	National Council for Voluntary Organisations
David Stone	Natural England
Carina Millstone	London Orchard Project
Ken Ryan	Mind
Ann Finlayson	Sustainability & Environmental Education (SEEd)
Mike Townsend	Woodland Trust
Paul Wilkinson	The Wildlife Trusts
Andy Johnston	Local Government Information Unit
Ann Persson	British Heart Foundation
Dr William Bird	Outdoor Health Forum
Jo Foster	MacMillan Cancer Support
Lucy Smith	Lambeth Primary Care Trust (PCT)
Mark Williamson	Action for Happiness
Philip Insall	Sustrans
Peter Lipman	Sustrans
Jonathan Fisher	Environment Agency
Julia Willison	BCGI – Botanic Conservation Garden International
Sherry Clark	South London & Maudsley NHS Foundation Trust SLAM
Simon Lawton-Smith	Mental Health Foundation
Paul de Zylva	Friends of the Earth
Jake Reynolds	Cambridge Sustainability Leadership Programme
Jonathan Campion	South London & Maudsley NHS Foundation Trust

Annex 2. List of participants at workshop (22 November 2011)

Bob Bloomfield	Natural History Museum
Gemma Bradshaw	Age UK
Phil Burfield	Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB)
Jo Butcher	National Children's Bureau
Neil Canham	Consultant (BTCV)
Justin Cooke	Ramblers
Paul de Zylva	Friends of the Earth
Kate Damiral	National Council for Voluntary Organisations
Mick Denness	British Trust for Conservation Volunteers (BTCV)
Aniol Esteban	**nef** (new economics foundation)
Zaria Greenhill	WWF-UK
Judith Hanna	Natural England
Louisa Hooper	Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation
Amanda Larsson	WWF-UK
Helen Meech	National Trust
Juliet Michaelson	**nef** (new economics foundation)
Paul Morling	Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB)
Rebekah Phillips	Green Alliance
Marina Robb	Circle of Life Rediscovery
Kath Rosen	London Orchard Project
Ken Ryan	Mind
Ruth Smyth	Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB)
Sarah Simmons	Sustainability & Environmental Education (SEEd)
Paul Sternberg	Action for Happiness
Simone Stribling	Woodland Trust
Laurie Thraves	Local Government Information Unit
Perry Walker	**nef** (new economics foundation)
Richard Williams	Mind
Graeme Willis	Campaign Protection of Rural England (CPRE)

Endnotes

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