

Natural Health in Dorset

A Dorset Local Nature Partnership Position Paper

Aim

Dorset Local Nature Partnership (DLNP) wants to see a physically and mentally healthy Dorset community which makes the most of its natural environment for exercise and wellbeing. The LNP would like to see investment in both the development of naturally healthy activities and in the natural environments where these are based to support preventative and remedial health and wellbeing interventions in Dorset.

Dorset Local Nature Partnership therefore makes the following recommendations:

Recommendations for Natural Health in Dorset

- 1) Recognition that activities in the natural environment have large beneficial outcomes both for participants and for the budgets of health and social care providers
- 2) Recognition of the health benefits in planning of both landscape development projects and services
- 3) That funding is invested in maintaining and enhancing the natural environment to ensure that there is a place where natural health activities can be undertaken as well as investment in the activities themselves
- 4) Development of a closer working relationship between the health and social care and the environment sectors in developing projects and commissioning services to improve the health of Dorset's residents



Why look at Natural Health in Dorset?

The Dorset LNP's *Natural Value Report 2014* highlighted that in 2010 £940 million was spent across England on dealing with physical inactivity with each Primary Care Trust (now Clinical Commissioning Groups - CCGs) spending on average £6.2 million. Due to the size of the Dorset CCG (with the second largest population in the country) this figure is likely to now be £12.5million. The *Natural Value Report* illustrates that the natural environment makes a major contribution to health and wellbeing but that this could be improved with improved access, more effective and well connected green and blue¹ infrastructure and better information for the public.

The Dorset LNP is keen to work with the Dorset and Bournemouth & Poole Health and Wellbeing Boards, Public Health Dorset, the Clinical Commissioning Group, Dorset Healthcare, local authorities and community and voluntary organisations to help make improvements to green infrastructure, access to open space and nature-based health interventions. By working together we can invest in preventative health and wellbeing solutions which will save money in both the health and social care sectors and within the wider economy in the longer term, through reduced absenteeism and improved productivity.

Some people will automatically use open spaces and the countryside to help them keep fit and mentally well, through walking, cycling, running and a range of adventure sports; they may even think about the links to nature having a benefit. For others, especially in more deprived areas, there is often less of a connection to the natural world and people may feel less confident in accessing nature or may simply not make the connection to how the environment can help their own health and wellbeing. For example not everyone thinks about how walking to and around a country park may be good for their heart and/or help to reduce stress.

The natural environment is often taken for granted as something that looks after itself but we need to invest in our natural spaces to ensure that they are maintained and enhanced and that they are easily accessible. This is especially important in a time when there are ever decreasing public funds available; environmental services are often seen as non-essential and their funding is often one of the first areas to be reduced. We can demonstrate that the lack of accessible open spaces has even greater implications than the already important environmental losses that we tend to be more familiar with.



River Frome Walk, Wareham

Photo: DWT

¹ Green infrastructure is the network of multi-functional green space, both new and existing, both rural and urban, which supports the natural and ecological processes and is integral to the health and quality of life of sustainable communities (Natural England, Green Infrastructure Guidance 2009). Blue infrastructure is specifically related to river systems and coastal environments, (i.e. water) but these are usually included within the collective term of green infrastructure.



What is the connection between our natural environment and health?

Humans have spent 99.98% of their time on earth being outdoors. Initially as hunter gathers, then in agriculture and the building of civilisations. The relatively recent changes starting with the industrial revolution and even more recent developments in technology have seen extreme changes in our lifestyles. The impact of these changes on our physiology and consequently our physical and mental health is significant and in part negative.

We are physically less active than ever before, and the time we spend relaxing our minds has also reduced. These dramatic changes are having measurable impacts on our weight, our resistance to disease, the development of low level conditions of anxiety, low mood and our overall wellbeing. In turn these changes are driving increased demand for health services in to a system that is already under strain.

These developments have started to drive and inspire research and interventions to understand the relationship that we have with our natural environment, in particular Green Infrastructure. The results are broadly consistent and are providing an emerging body of evidence that describes the value that the environment can make to health – “A Natural Health Service”.



A walk in Purbeck
Photo: Dorset LNP



Beach volleyball at Studland
Photo: Dorset LNP

A vision for Natural Health in Dorset

In the Dorset LNP's *Vision and Strategy 2014*² and *Natural Value Report 2014*³ we set out the cornerstones of our vision for natural health. These are: access to the natural environment and natural spaces; tackling health inequalities; and working with others to develop an integrated natural health service. Dorset has the natural ingredients to deliver this service. Built on good foundations we have the opportunity to improve public health in an affordable way.

This paper seeks to start meaningful conversations with all the stakeholders involved (land owners and managers, health professionals, NGO's, activity providers etc.) to develop a shared, funded and deliverable strategy that improves health and protects the value of our natural environment.

Sustainability and Transformation Plans are being developed across the country by public services coordinated by NHS England and social care profession as this paper is published. We have the opportunity to work together to embed the role of the environment to promote health and wellbeing into future plans and discussions are already taking place. A greater focus is being given to 'prevention at scale' than in previous plans and natural health can play a strong role in this agenda.

² www.dorsetlnp.org.uk/Dorset_LNP_Vision_and_Strategy

³ www.dorsetlnp.org.uk/Natural_Value_Report



Natural Health Benefits

A strong body of literature and evidence has established the importance of the relationship between the environment, public health and wellbeing. Here is a snap shot of a growing body of studies:

- Physical inactivity affects 60-70% of the population, the physical fitness of children is declining by up to 9% per year. The costs of inactivity are estimated to be £20 billion a year to the economy including direct treatment and lost days at work (All Party Commission 2014)
- An active workforce reduces costs on healthcare, reduces absenteeism/sick days and increases productivity (Prosper et al 2002)
- Poor investment in employee the health and wellbeing is costing £57 billion a year in lost productivity (Britain's Healthiest Workplace Survey 2015)
- For every £1 spent on establishing healthy walking schemes the NHS could save £7.18 from the cost of treating conditions such as heart disease, stroke or diabetes. (NE 2009)
- People living near quality green space, full of wildlife and thriving habitats, were twice as likely to report low psychological distress than those living near low quality open spaces (Soc Sci and Med 74)
- Individuals with easy access to nature are three times more likely to participate in physical activity and 40% less likely to become overweight or obese (BMC Public Health 10)
- Physical activity can tackle the growing problem of isolation, in addition to direct health benefits, in older people (G.Windle et al 2008)
- Systematic reviews show that exercising outdoors in natural green spaces provides additional benefit to mental health (Env Sci Tech 45)
- The Land Trust reported that every pound invested in parks and nature reserves contributes £30 towards health and wellbeing benefits and £23 towards crime reduction and community safety (The Value of our Green Spaces Jan 16).

It is ironic that 200 years after Bournemouth was created as a health resort we are writing a paper to extol the values of nature to health, to ensure that nature is protected. Escaping our polluted cities to rural, seaside spa resorts like Bournemouth was something those that could afford it were encouraged to do. The sea air, mild climate, the smell of hot pines, the walks across the heaths... these were all things that 'were good for you'. The big Victorian sanatoriums were, mostly, in rural estate settings – not just to be hidden away from the general populous, but to provide patients with a therapeutic, calm environment. The "model villages" of the Victorian industrial period such as Saltaire and Bourneville etc. highlighted the value of supporting a healthy workforce to improve productivity, through good living standards and recreation opportunities. The Public Health Act of 1875 enabled local authorities to acquire land and lay it out as a pleasure gardens and parks. The creation of the National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act in 1949 was partly driven by the desire to preserve natural space for public recreation. Doctors used to tell you to go for a walk, or get a dog, so that you would be more active in the natural environment.

Quite why the provision of access to nature fell off the general prescription is debatable – is it a treatment focused NHS, a consequence of Big Pharma, a lack of quality nature to prescribe, patients wanting a pill to solve their ailments or, perhaps, a symptom of the progressive disconnection from nature that has happened over the past 60 years? Probably a complex mix of these factors.

Recently more research has taken place on why nature is good for you, recognising the potential impact on human health that a disconnection from nature is having. This is an idea that is intuitively easy to understand, indeed is widely understood, but bringing nature into a health system is proving to be more difficult.



Nature is a drug that people have been self-medicating with since we, as a species, decided to group together and live sedentary lives. Intuitively many people will seek natural space to de-stress, go for a walk, stand on a cliff to feel the breeze and admire the view. Yet, for various societal reasons we haven't managed to bring nature into our mainstream health services. Therefore as our population has become more disconnected from nature it has become disconnected from the beneficial impact accessing nature has upon our health. Biophilia (our inbuilt need for experiencing the natural world) that all our ancestors would have had, has in the past few generations diminished in both the amount and quality. Couple that with a drug prescription culture (where many people want the ease of taking a pill to get better), it is easy to see why the value nature has to health is being forgotten.

There is a growing movement, worldwide, to promote access to nature as a mainstream health treatment for a variety of mild conditions and as a fundamental public health measure. Nature reduces stress. Nature makes us more resilient. Exercise within a natural environment makes us fitter than equivalent exercise within an indoor/built environment. Dementia patients are happier after accessing nature. Patients recover quicker from operations and require less painkillers when having views of nature. Accessing nature enables patients to recover faster from mental trauma. And so on... there is so much evidence that nature is good for you. It won't cure cancer or mend a broken foot, but accessing nature during and after treatment will improve recovery times.

It is also worth pointing out here the other health benefits that nature can provide. Reducing atmospheric and aquatic pollution are key services played by nature in Dorset. As climate change continues to impact our county, understanding the role that nature can play in our built environment, providing cooling and dust filtering is essential. The production of local food can also help by supporting a healthy diet as well as reducing food miles and the associated carbon emissions and air pollution.

So humans need nature for better health. A lot of Dorset residents already experience the health benefits of our wonderful diverse, healthy, accessible natural spaces. Yet physical access isn't equal, and in the areas with greatest health need there is not always a great nature experience to be had. Intellectual access to nature, as mentioned, is diminishing – so those that need nature most don't always know that nature can help them live healthier lifestyles, and even if they do they may not know where to go to get it or may not feel confident enough to venture into the unknown.

What nature doesn't have is a huge marketing budget behind it, selling the product as a pill. It does have a price tag though.



Richard Fellowship work party
Photo: Borough of Poole

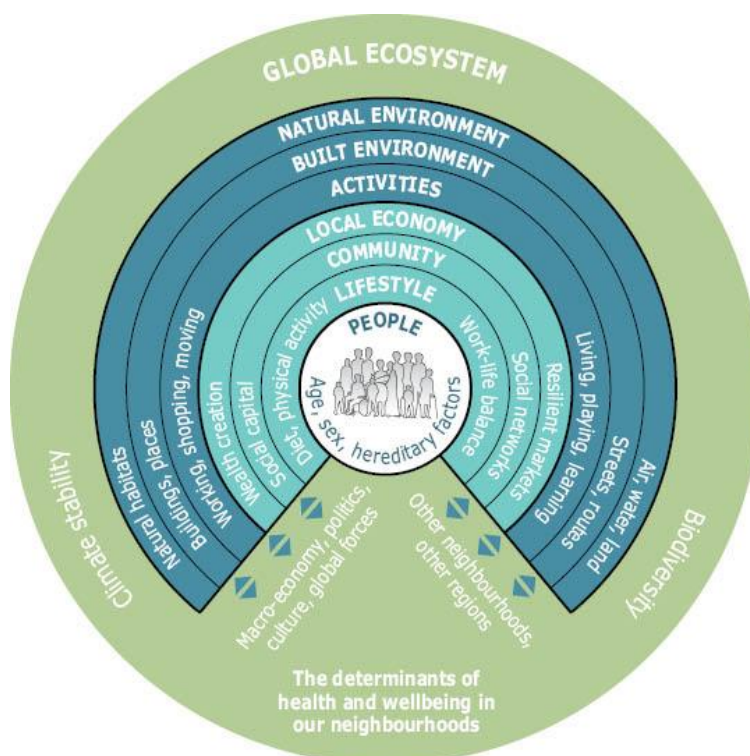


Nordic walking
Photo: Dorset LNP



Policy Drivers

The state of the natural, built and social environment at global and local level are now recognised as key determinants of health and health inequalities, as represented in Barton and Grant's 'health map'⁴ below.



In recent years a series of national policy developments and initiatives have recognised these links and encouraged public bodies to take account of them in policy development and service delivery.

The 2010 Marmot Review of effective evidence-based strategies for reducing health inequalities in England⁵ (led by Professor Sir Michael Marmot) highlighted a strong link between the natural environment, health and health inequalities. The review considered the evidence on a wide range of global and local environmental determinants of health outcomes, concluding that:

- Health improvement (both physical and mental) can be evidenced across all social classes with access to green and open spaces
- Proximity to green spaces improves activity levels of children and individuals in urban areas, with lower rates of diseases such as diabetes, cancers, migraine and depression if people have more green spaces within 1km of where they live
- Health inequalities of all-cause and cardiovascular mortality, related to income deprivation, were lower in populations living in the greenest areas
- Green infrastructure reduces urban temperatures and improves drainage, reducing the health risks associated with flood events and heat waves

⁴ Source: Barton H and Grant M (2006) 'A health map for the local human habitat' in Journal of the Royal Society for the Promotion of Health Vol 126, No 6

⁵ The Marmot Review (2010). Fair Society, Healthy Lives: Strategic review of health inequalities in England post-2010. www.instituteofhealthequity.org/projects/fair-society-healthy-lives-the-marmot-review/fair-society-healthy-lives-full-report

The recommendations of the Marmot Review, designed to 'create and develop healthy and sustainable places and communities', included:

- Improving provision of 'active travel' modes
- Improving the availability of good quality open spaces
- Improving the energy efficiency of housing
- Integrating the planning of transport, housing, environmental and health systems to address determinants of health

The Natural Environment White Paper (DEFRA, 2011)⁶ approached the same issue from the perspective of the benefits to be gained from (and the costs of damaging) the natural environment, and concluded that individuals, communities and the economy cannot flourish without healthy natural systems to support them. It was informed by a number of sources, including the Marmot Review, and the UK National Ecosystem Assessment (NEA). The White Paper, which established a national network of Local Nature Partnerships to advocate the benefits of well managed natural environments, concluded that:

- Access to nature has a positive impact on mental and physical health
- High-quality natural environments foster healthy neighbourhoods, with green spaces encouraging social activity and reductions in crime
- The natural environment can aid children's learning
- Sustainable economic growth and community wellbeing relies on services provided by the natural environment, often referred to as 'ecosystem services' (clean water, clean air, productive soils, pollination)
- These services are provided 'free' but costs to society and the economy arise when the ability of the natural environment to provide them is damaged
- Protected natural areas can yield economic returns many times higher than the cost of their protection (as evidenced by the recent DCC report)
- Directors of Public Health 'will be ideally placed to influence local services, for example joining up activity on rights of way, countryside access and green space management to improve public health by connecting people with nature'



Rock pooling in Ringstead Bay
Photo: Dorset LNP

⁶ HM Government (2011). The Natural Choice: securing the value of nature.

www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/228842/8082.pdf



Buildings on these themes, in 2013, The Kings Fund⁷ identified the pivotal role of local authorities in past and future improvements to population health. Their report focused on nine areas in which there is strong and clear evidence that local authorities can have a major impact on health. It outlines what local authorities can do to influence health and the business case for doing so. Their nine key areas identified that can improve public health and reduce inequalities were:

- The best start in life
- Healthy schools and pupils
- Helping people find good jobs and stay in work
- **Active and safe travel**
- Warmer and safer homes
- **Access to green and open spaces and the role of leisure services**
- Strong communities, wellbeing and resilience
- Public protection and regulatory services
- **Health and spatial planning.**

Although the contribution the wider environment, and providers of environmental services, make to public health in this context is most obvious in the case of the areas highlighted in bold in the above list, they can in reality influence all nine key areas.

Case study: Stepping into Nature – supporting people with Dementia with Forest Schools

Weymouth Reedbed Ramble

Join us in the heart of Weymouth to discover the natural beauty of Radipole Lake. We will be getting close to nature through outdoor activities including gentle walking on the reserve, listening to and watching birds as well as some art and craft activities. Each session will be different and led by the RSPB staff.

Open to all, these sessions are dementia friendly and aim to make you feel comfortable and confident exploring and enjoying the outdoor environment



Cost £3 includes activities & a hot drink

Mondays 2:30-4:30

4th July, 18th July, 1st August, 15th August, 29th August, 12th September

Booking required Weymouth.reserves@rspb.org.uk 01305 778313



Reedbed Ramble Poster
Photo: Dorset AONB

‘Stepping into nature’⁸ was developed initially at a small scale by the Dorset AONB Partnership, to help older people and those living with dementia and their carers connect with the landscape around them.

Countryside rangers and other environmental service providers have been trained to understand and accommodate the needs of people with dementia, enabling them to lead safe and beneficial outdoor activities to improve mental and physical health and wellbeing. The project is now the subject of a more ambitious bid to the Big Lottery ‘Reaching Communities’ funding stream.

The GP Dr William Bird, who has pioneered progressive thinking about the relationship between health and the environment, has collated and cited peer reviewed studies which show that exposure to green space reduces anxiety and depression, reduces health inequalities, moderates the effect of stressful events in children and improves cognitive performance. Based on this, he argues that:

- Human evolution means we are designed to be connected with nature, yet most of us now live in urban environments where contact with nature is less

⁷ The Kings Fund (2013). Improving the public’s health: A resource for local authorities.

www.kingsfund.org.uk/sites/files/kf/field/publication_file/improving-the-publics-health-kingsfund-dec13.pdf

⁸ www.dorsetaonb.org.uk/our-work/health-and-wellbeing



- The move to urban environments has occurred in the blink of an eye in evolutionary terms
- When disconnected from nature we are more likely to develop chronic stress, leading to what has been termed 'nature deficit disorder'
- We then tend to eat more and exercise less, leading to the epidemic of chronic disease
- This epidemic can be countered by reconnecting people with nature and more active lifestyles
- A 'prescription' of moderate exercise for 12 months would produce better health outcomes and fewer readmissions at lower cost than fitting the same patient with a coronary stent
- The health benefits of, e.g., 'Green Gyms' offering outdoor exercise are superior to those of conventional gyms, while being available at a fraction of the cost.

The evidence summarised above has profound implications for public service provision:

- It suggests that the costs and benefits of improving access to greenspace and encouraging active modes of travel should be considered against those of more conventional forms of healthcare when commissioning services designed to improve public health and wellbeing
- It challenges the conventional wisdom that environmental protection is more of an issue for rural, 'well to do' areas, and has little to offer those for whom health outcomes are generally poorer
- It suggests that, rather than being seen as competing for limited resources in terms of public funding, investment in 'people' and 'place' based services should be seen as complementary
- Investment in 'green infrastructure' and active travel should be seen as a key part of wider 'preventative' public service strategies designed to manage demand by providing low cost, 'upstream' interventions in preference to high cost, 'end-of-pipe' interventions.

Case study: Care Farms – Future Roots

There are a variety of Care Farms across Dorset, providing a range of farming, horticultural and countryside skills based activities for different client groups including young people, older people, those with mental health problems and families.



Future Roots⁹, for example, offers activities on two sites Rylands Farm near Sherborne and Whitfields near Dorchester. Activities at these site includes The Countrymen's Club and The Countrywomen's Club which offer activities for those over 60. The activities at these sessions vary depending on who is attending but include therapeutic horticulture, animal assisted activities, and rural reminiscence in a countryside setting, helping to reduce rural isolation.

Opportunities for the future

It seems relatively straightforward: we know that spending time outdoors and being active is good for you, we live in one of the most scenic parts of the country with no shortage of accessible open space; yet not enough of us are getting out often enough.

⁹ www.futureroots.net



GPs have advised that they need something really simple to pass onto patients, something that's regular, accessible, affordable (ideally free), welcoming, enjoyable and local. Many of the events that are offered in open spaces tend to be seasonal or sporadic, as a one off they can inspire people, but they're not necessarily habit forming for those that take them up.

There are examples of activities that do fit the bill across the country, but when it comes to providing regular group activities for free, perhaps with little opportunity to generate income to cover costs, there is narrower offer.

Both the 'Walking the Way to Health' initiative and Parkrun are volunteer led activities; they're easily replicable, welcoming and enjoyable, which is good for those that wish to walk or run. They work best where the activity is housed somewhere with parking, toilets, some shelter (or better still a cafe). There are numerous Park Volunteer or 'Friends' Groups across the county, often meeting on a regular basis to undertake practical tasks and get involved in social activities and events. However, the offer of activity varies from group to group and there's no single directory available. Another possible hurdle to overcome with such groups is creating something of a standardised offer that GPs or health practitioners can trust.

Local authority and third sector ranger/park services also run regular practical groups undertaking tasks like scrub clearance, path maintenance etc. There is some scope here to develop referral schemes. The best schemes are those that are designed to work for the people being referred. Weight Watchers is an established brand and format for weight loss, what can the natural environment offer to compete with?

Examples of existing natural health activities in Dorset which we can build on are included through this position paper in the case study boxes. The examples (Natural Choices, Stepping into Nature, Care Farms and Activate Coast and Countryside) illustrate the potential for improved outcomes for public health and the environment to be delivered through collaboration between relevant agencies. It is fair to say that these collaborations have generally come about as a result of the pro-active initiative of like-minded individuals operating within health and environmental services, rather than with the explicit support of the strategic leadership of both sectors.



A countryside dog walk
Photo: Dorset LNP



A 'mindfulness naturally' walk
Photo: Dorset LNP



Case study: Natural Choices



Natural Choices on the River Stour
Photo: RSPB

'Natural Choices'¹⁰ evolved from a GP-led initiative in Weymouth and Portland to support patients who have been identified as experiencing low risk mental and/or physical health problems. It provides health care professionals with an easy pathway to signpost patients to a wide range of recognised providers offering activities in, and focusing on, the natural environment, including health walks, conservation activities, mindfulness in nature and wildlife gardening activities.

Activities are geared towards getting people outside who might not normally consider these types of activities and who would benefit from encouragement and guidance from a trained activity leader. Activities under Natural Choices are then fed into LiveWell Dorset who can signpost activities as appropriate to their clients.

The Dorset Coast Forum led the pilot project in Weymouth and Portland, with funding from the Dorset Clinical Commissioning Group, Dorset County Council, the RSPB and the Olympic Legacy Fund, and additional support from Natural England, Weymouth & Portland Borough Council, the Dorset AONB, the Dorset Wildlife Trust and Bournemouth University. The Dorset LNP is leading efforts to roll out the project across Dorset.

Investing in a Natural Health Service

While the developments summarised above have significant implications for providers of health and care services, they have also presented challenges for organisations involved in nature conservation which have traditionally made the case for looking after the environment in terms of its intrinsic value – 'for its own sake'. While this remains important, the wider benefits of a healthy environment can now be seen to provide a rationale for nature to be conserved for the benefits it offers to people and communities as well as for wildlife. In doing so, the potential for new partnerships to be forged between providers of health services, and providers of environmental services, to achieve mutually beneficial outcomes, appears greatly enhanced. In Dorset, where the environment is of a high quality and relatively accessible already, this potential would appear even greater.

At the same time, many environmental services (maintenance of Rights of Way, promotion of sustainable transport, countryside management, biodiversity conservation and management of designated sites) are facing service reductions and/or funding cuts in as much as they depend in part on public funding. This may be because their value is still being judged in terms of what they deliver for 'the environment' in narrow terms, an equation which fails to take into account the

¹⁰ www.dorsetlnp.org.uk/Natural_Choices_in_Dorset



wider contribution they make to health and wellbeing. The evidence cited above certainly suggests that there would be strongly negative effects if, for example, there were to be a significant deterioration in the access to or quality of the greenspace which these services provide. Finding new ways to sustain these services will therefore be important if the benefits to health and wellbeing are to be fully realised.

If we are to realise the opportunities to reduce health care costs through exposure to and use of the natural environment then we need a credible plan to pay for:

- The capital investment necessary to increase the amount of accessible greenspace so that all citizens, and especially the most disadvantaged who evidence suggests benefit disproportionately, can have easy access to appropriate greenspace.
- Revenue streams to allow greenspace to be maintained to a high standard so that it remains attractive and useable.

At a time of reducing public funding this seems a challenge. Turning first to the capital challenge few greenspace capital projects and especially large projects are funded from a single source. Indeed many funders stipulate that they will not be the sole funder and even where, for example a local authority, could in theory be a sole funder budget restrictions make this increasingly unlikely. Major funding generally needs partnership working. Dorset excels at natural environment partnerships (recent examples include Wild Purbeck Nature Improvement Area, Great Heath Project, Wild About Weymouth and Portland) and should give us a substantial advantage, if we choose to use it, in drawing together future proposals.

It is well established with planners that new development can / should / must (depending on the circumstances) contribute to green infrastructure (generally synonymous with public open space) that supports the development. In Dorset this is most frequently demonstrated by the need for new housing in SE Dorset (plus others) to provide Suitable Alternative Natural Greenspace (SANGs) to mitigate for the potential of increased recreational disturbance on the heathlands. However this kind of provision does not require use of the Habitats Regulations and arguably, now that we know so much about the health benefits of greenspace, then satisfying a regulation should not be the main driver. The Weymouth relief road and the subsequent Lorton Valley Nature Park would be a good recent example of where European regulation played no part in the provision.



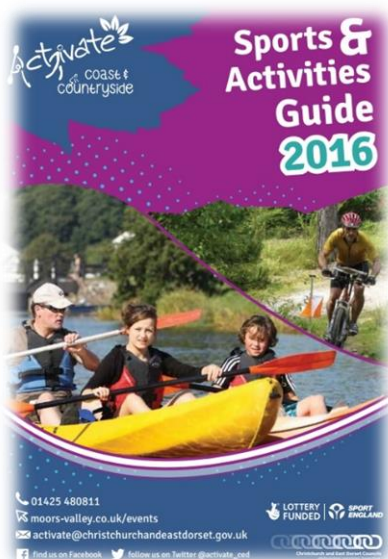
Enjoying the view at Hengistbury Head
Photo: Bournemouth Borough Council



Cycling in the fresh air
Photo: Alastair Cook



Case study: Activate Coast and Countryside



Sports and activity guide 2016

Picture: Christchurch and East Dorset Councils

Activate Coast and Countryside¹¹ is a three year project within East Dorset and Christchurch funded by Sport England. The project provides a wide range of activities to enable people to get active outdoors. Coordinated by Christchurch and East Dorset Councils the activities are mostly focused around three hubs: Moors Valley County Park and Forest, Kingston Lacy National Trust and Highcliffe Castle.

Activities range from fishing, surfing, kayaking, orienteering, mountain biking, Nordic Walking, countryside walks and outdoor fitness circuits to name a few. Sessions include tasters or 'learn to' to enable people to learn with qualified instructors to develop skills in these activities.

If a developer is, quite legitimately, required by the planning authority to make a Green Infrastructure contribution there is no reason why that contribution cannot be 'matched' with other contributions (for example from Heritage Lottery Fund) into order to lever additional resources into the project.

In terms of revenue funding the two easy answers with plenty of historical precedent are that local authorities should fund this maintenance from their core budgets and/or, for new developer funded green infrastructure part of the developer's legacy should be an endowment to help enable future management. These tried and tested approaches are running into some difficulty as a result of both the squeeze on local authority spending and the low interest rates that tend to apply to the investment of any endowment.

Following the London 2012 Olympic Games, Dorset County Council hosted the '*Inspired by 2012 Health and Wellbeing Legacy Fund*'. This funding stream (open to projects in Bournemouth, Dorset and Poole with the aim of reducing health inequalities) allocated £704,000 to 56 projects – contributing to projects costs of around £2.44million. An analysis of the fund highlighted that the projects saved the NHS around £4.5million. Around 27% of the projects focused on activities within the natural environment (so potentially around £1.1millions savings to the NHS from these projects alone). This highlights the relatively small amounts of funding can make a huge impact to Dorset health and wellbeing.

¹¹ www.moors-valley.co.uk/activatecoastandcountryside



Additional opportunities that we might collectively seek to help bridge this gap include collaborations with the private sector – for example catering franchises or other licencing opportunities associated with green infrastructure, or investments from business to support a healthy and productive workforce – in order to establish new revenue streams. We may also test the potential for Voluntary Conservation Organisations (VCOs) to accept the ownership and future management of green infrastructure which they can then support from their core membership activities.



Kayaking along the Jurassic Coast
Photo: Stewart Canham

Final words

In summary we now understand, on the basis of recent evidence, that a high quality natural environment and human wellbeing are far more closely linked than was previously thought. Opportunities exist to exploit this understanding by providing both new and enhanced green infrastructure utilising the already close partnership working that exists in Dorset to access existing and potential new funding streams.

If, as the evidence suggests, access to good quality green space offers benefits to public health and wellbeing, Dorset, with its outstanding and accessible environment, enjoys significant advantages in terms of the ability to leverage these benefits. To fully exploit these advantages will need closer collaboration between relevant agencies across the environment/health axis at both the strategic and operational level.

The commissioning process for health services is not well understood by environmental service providers, and another benefit of this closer collaboration would be to ensure that where environmental services have the potential to improve health outcomes, commissioning bodies are aware of these options (as has been made possible by the 'Natural Choices' project) and can consider them in their decision-making processes.



Both nationally and regionally there is an increasing interest in developing closer links between the health and environment sectors to develop or improve natural health services, many making links with academic research to provide the evidence of these programmes. Exeter University organised a '*How to commission health services from nature*' conference in May 2016 showcasing a variety of projects around the country offering nature based health interventions including Dorset's Natural Choices; GP referral schemes on Exmoor and Dartmoor National Parks; Nature 4 Health activities in the Mersey Forest and a Dose of Nature project lead by Exeter University. Further conferences and workshops are planned around the country in autumn 2016 and beyond.

The Dorset LNP is keen to develop closer working relationships with the health sector; maintain links with local authorities to support and enhance the natural health service opportunities in Dorset; develop mutually beneficial projects; and implement the recommendations set out at the front of this statement.



Mindful awareness of nature
Photo: Dorset LNP



The art of drawing nature
Photo: Dorset Wildlife Trust

For more information

Please contact the Dorset Local Nature Partnership for further information:
info@dorsetlnp.org.uk

Or see the website: www.dorsetlnp.org.uk

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