

Transforming Mental Health and Dementia Provision with the Natural Environment

Conference Report – Executive Summary



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The full report can be found [on the Centre for Sustainable Healthcare's Website](#)

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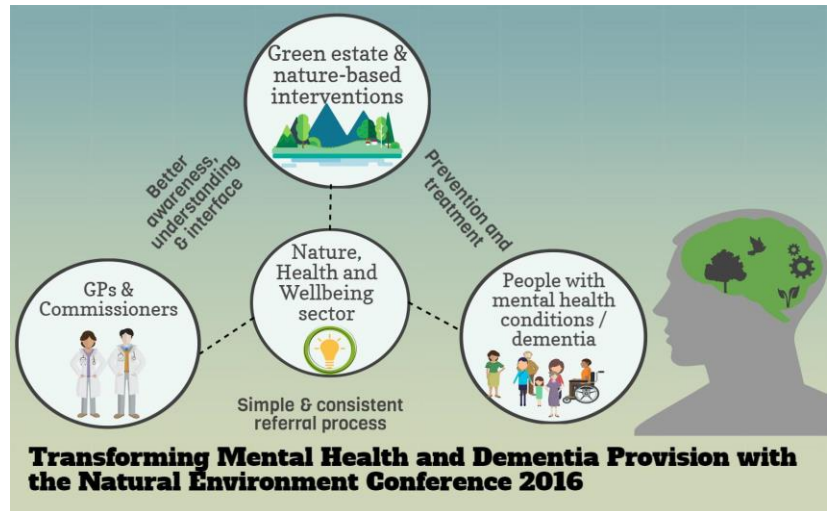
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Executive Summary

1. Background

In November 2016 the conference: **Transforming Mental Health and Dementia Provision with the Natural Environment** brought together key policy makers, researchers, service providers and decision makers from the Health, Social Care and Natural Environment Sectors to:

- Build a shared understanding of the scale, scope and diversity of the natural environment and its potential to make a significant contribution to both preventative and therapeutic mental health and dementia interventions.
- Begin to identify practical ways to enable the commissioning and delivery of nature-based solutions.
- Develop dialogue between the Natural Environment Sector and the Health and Social Care Sectors, to ensure that nature-based health and wellbeing services can be shaped to meet potential demand.



More details, including speaker presentations from the day can all be accessed [here](#).

2. Three key themes to emerge from the Conference

Three themes emerged from the conference, which centred around: the scale of the mental health challenge and the subsequent opportunities for the Nature, Health and Wellbeing Sector; the barriers to scaling-up nature-based services; and developing solutions to these barriers.

a) The scale of the opportunity



The scale of the challenge to support prevention and treatment of mental ill health is huge. This presents an immediate opportunity for the Nature, Health and Wellbeing Sector to scale up and mainstream delivery of its services. This opportunity is particularly strong as this Sector offers services across the full range of public health and therapeutic needs, and has an evidence base that is strong compared to other intervention types. (For more information on this see the [Review of nature based interventions for mental health care](#))

b) The barriers

Barriers preventing commissioning of services from the Nature, Health and Wellbeing Sector at scale include:

- lack of consistent or standardised referral mechanisms
- lack of quality assurance or appropriate impact measurement frameworks being used for nature-based services
- lack of funding for the delivery of services offered through social prescribing, despite these often being provided in the community by third sector organisations.

c) The solutions

Solutions revolve around the need to build better partnerships between the Nature, Health and Wellbeing Sector and the Health and Social Care Sectors. Partnerships would help to:

Build awareness of the evidence on the scale and scope of benefits delivered by nature based interventions and services.

There is a strong evidence base to support progression of this agenda, especially in relation to supporting public health through preventative nature-based interventions. There is a need for better evidence in relation to specific therapeutic interventions and in relation to reducing pressure on existing health and social care services (including GP practices) as well as cost savings.



Develop better links between the Nature, Health and Wellbeing Sector and health service referral systems and social prescribing services.



The workshop case studies raised the need to offer a single point of contact to represent local partnerships and organisations within the local Nature, Health and Wellbeing Sector, so that referral and prescribing systems can connect more easily with and understand the potential impact of the full scale and scope of quality assured local services available. The National Outdoors for All Working Group and Outdoors for All Strategic Research Group are well placed to continue to provide leadership and coordination at the national level. However, coordination of the Nature, Health and Wellbeing Sector at the local level needs to be addressed.

Bring researchers, practitioners and relevant agencies together so that they can identify, develop and adopt:

- **Quality assurance frameworks** (for advocating, delivering and assessing nature, health and wellbeing services) and,
- **Evaluation frameworks** (that include economic impact, including reduction in pressure on existing health and social care services and cost savings, as well as standard measures of clinical health and wellbeing.)

Test models for enabling sustainable growth of service provision to meet potential demand.

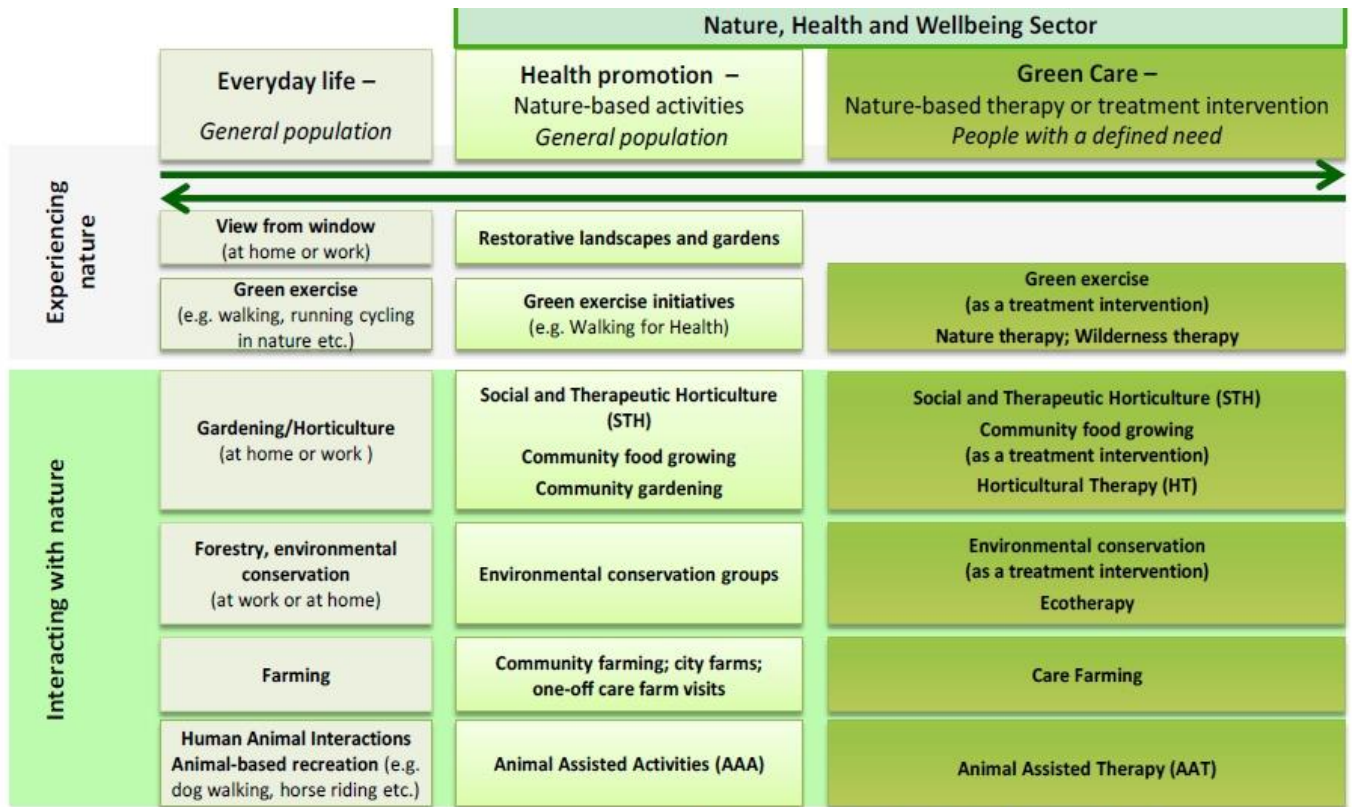
The themes that emerged from the conference strongly reflect and support those set out in the recent paper on [Good practice in social prescribing for mental health: the role of nature-based interventions](#). This suggests that the challenges and solutions for transforming provision of nature-based services to meet mental health needs closely mirror those for wider health and social care.

Natural England Commissioned Report NECR228

Good practice in social prescribing for mental health: the role of nature-based interventions



3. The way forward



Source: Adapted from Haubenhofer, Bragg et al., 2010; Sempik and Bragg, 2013; Bragg 2014

In considering these possible solutions, the Nature, Health and Wellbeing Sector were challenged to:

a. Develop a more consistent approach

The adjacent framework diagram was suggested to help represent the wide range of offers available from the Nature, Health and Wellbeing Sector and how these can be applied across every day, health prevention and green care contexts.

More detail on this diagram can be found in the Appendix and [Good practice in social prescribing for mental health: the role of nature-based interventions](#)

b. Know who to influence and how

The National Outdoors for All Working Group will continue championing and facilitating change at the national level, supported by the Outdoors for All Strategic Research Group. At area and local levels, advice for the Nature, Health and Wellbeing Sector was to:

- develop more consistent messages based on existing evidence and case studies
- develop more consistent approaches for supporting GPs and commissioning groups with clear service offers and points of contact
- increase the pace at which this is happening
- engage with the wider planning architecture in which health and social care commissioners sit
- focus on investing limited resources where they could best meet commissioners' priorities.

c. Promote the Nature, Health and Wellbeing Sector's role in maintaining the sustainability of natural environments

The infographic features a large speech bubble shape on a light green background. Inside the bubble, there are three key points: 1. A pound sign icon followed by the text 'The estimated annual cost of mental illness is **£105.2 billion***'. 2. A magnifying glass icon over a document followed by 'Evidence shows the health benefits of access to quality green spaces'. 3. A lightbulb icon with a plant growing inside it followed by 'Nature based health intervention programmes are delivering **significant savings**'. To the right of the bubble is a silhouette of a human head in profile, with a green brain area containing icons of a tree, a butterfly, and gears. Below the bubble, the text reads 'Transforming Mental Health and Dementia Provision with the Natural Environment Conference 2016' and '*Ref NECR204'.

Nature-based service providers rely on high quality natural environments and landscapes to deliver their services, so they have a vested interest in operating in ways that support the ongoing sustainable use and development of these spaces. Whilst nature, health and wellbeing services are often very cost effective, these interventions and the management of spaces are not cost free and these costs need to be covered, for example to support delivery models based on well-managed volunteering.

d. Promote the Nature, Health and Wellbeing Sector's role in advancing mental health literacy:

Drawing on experience in Canada, the Nature, Health and Wellbeing Sector was encouraged to consider its potential role in supporting development of society's awareness and understanding of good mental health, of ways to prevent mental ill health and of where to seek support.



4. Update

The Outdoors for All Working Group, supported by Natural England and the Outdoors for All Strategic Research Group, remain committed to providing ongoing leadership for progressing the themes and recommendations that have emerged from their conference on Transforming Mental Health and Dementia with Natural Environments. They will continue to work with NHS England and Defra on practical ways to mainstream the Nature, Health and Wellbeing Sector offer.

Continued momentum is offering a real opportunity for the Nature, Health and Wellbeing Sector to ensure their services are considered. For example, The National Outdoors for All Working Group are working closely with colleagues across the NHS, Department of Health, Defra and the Kings' Fund to explore opportunities for strengthening the offer of the Nature, Health and Wellbeing Sector and have been working actively with others to scope the potential for sector-wide codes of practice and competency frameworks and to identify ways to demonstrate the effectiveness of nature-based interventions in specific therapeutic contexts.

