



Health and Nature Dorset (HAND)

Context

There is significant and growing evidence that increasing access and engagement in greenspaces to encourage physical activity and social connections can improve and maintain good physical health & mental wellbeing, reduce social isolation and loneliness and support recovery from ill health.

Definitions of greenspace vary, and can be described as 'natural environment', 'open space', 'green infrastructure' and 'blue space'. For the purpose of this document greenspace refers to any area of vegetated land and/or visible water bodies, urban or rural, natural or semi-natural. These include public and private spaces such as parks, gardens, playing fields, children's play areas, woods, heaths and nature reserves, grassed areas, cemeteries and allotments, green corridors, disused railway lines, rivers, lakes, canals and the sea.

The Covid-19 crisis has shone a light on the ability to access greenspace for physical and mental wellbeing, locally and globally. Access to these spaces has been shown to be dependent on locality, socioeconomics and government restrictions. Subsequently there has been much interest in how greenspaces can be made more accessible for those who are experiencing difficulties in simply getting out.

Dorset has a strong nature-based wellbeing offer and by working together to developing a joint vision with coordination of activity and communication we can grow new initiatives and enhance current offers ensuring efficiency, adoption and sharing of good practice.

Our Covid response has shown the importance of working together and has enabled us to develop new alliances with tangible actions that can be jointly delivered, with a focus on the importance of the provision of equitable greenspaces for people experiencing inequalities.

As we now head into our recovery stage we need to be mindful of the lessons we have learnt over the last year and look to utilise our strengths to champion the opportunities for people, communities, businesses and organisations to engage with nature in a way that benefits wellbeing.

Background

The Health and Nature Dorset collaboration grew from existing partnership working between Dorset AONB (via the Stepping into Nature project), Dorset Local Nature Partnership (via the Natural Choices project), Active Dorset (via the Active Ageing project) and Public Health Dorset.

Working closely with others has taught us to be honest and transparent to secure buy-in from partners, by agreeing common aims and objectives we can build a strong collaboration and leave that 'what's in it for us' mentality, creating a sense of shared ownership, trust and respect.

In 2019 a workshop explored ideas to increase collaboration between health and environment sectors to support health and wellbeing. Attended by a range of stakeholders including the Integrated Care System lead from the CCG, Assistant Director of Public Health Dorset, GP Locality lead from Dorset Health and Wellbeing Board, Chief Clinical Information Officer and Medical Director from NHS England South West, local authority open space leads and environmental charities and organisations.

Two partnership bids were developed during 2020 – a Shaping Places for Healthier Lives (stage two bid) and Green Prescribing for Mental Health (expression of interest). Unfortunately, both were unsuccessful but have helped shape this proposal.

HAND Proposal

Vision

- To increase the access to, use of and connection with the natural environment to support and enhance physical and mental wellbeing across Dorset.

Draft Collaboration Aims

- To increase participation in activities in and connection to the natural environment.
- To improve physical and mental wellbeing of residents, workers, and visitors to Dorset.
- To strengthen collaborative working through a more formalised governance approach.
- To improve communication, between activity providers, service providers and signposting services and the wider public.
- To lever in funds from external sources to maximise the H&W benefits the natural environment provides.
- To coordinate activity in the growing environment/health sectoral overlap leading to efficiency in investments.
- To improve shared learning and training within the system to support an efficient and effective offer.
- To improve monitoring and evaluation through development of a common framework.
- To engage and support communities and organisations to deliver the co-production of nature-based opportunities including those most in need of accessing opportunities to support wellbeing.
- To influence local and national policy and strategies related to this agenda through a collective voice.
- To gain local insight of around the challenges of increasing access to and connection with greenspaces for health and wellbeing.

Draft Objectives

- We will investigate and collate existing data and research to frame our approach.
- We will talk to people who do not access greenspaces for health/wellbeing currently – with a focus on those with a long-term health condition, vulnerable to social isolation, under served, carers or inactive.
- We will work with key organisations to reach targeted groups such as Dorset Race Equality Council, Participation People (youth voice), mental health groups.
- We will talk to prospective sign-posters (e.g., health and social care staff, HR managers) to– including barriers to access / engagement / identifying gaps in provision.
- Talk to nature-based wellbeing providers to access barriers to engaging with more people.
- We will develop a short-term communications strategy to deliver the research phase.
- We will share the insights with stakeholders to influence future work.
- Develop pilot projects and shape nature-based opportunities with communities and stakeholders.

Draft Early Outputs

- A steering group (quarterly meetings)
- Wider HAND collaboration network (regular newsletters and an annual conference/workshop)
- Insight report of evidence and barriers
- Tools to share insights (including communications plan)
- Priorities for next phase

Draft Longer-term outputs

- A health and nature long term strategy at a logical scale (e.g., LNP/ICS geography), setting out the vision and a medium-term roadmap to achieve it.
- A common evaluation framework.
- An outline proposal of projects to contribute to population health management through engagement in nature for wellbeing. It might be in early stage to pilot a few approaches to see if they work.
- A training offer for providers (e.g. MHFA and Dementia Awareness)

Draft Outcomes

- People in Dorset are healthier, socially included and connected to nature.
- More people are utilising outdoor space for exercise / health reasons.
- There is greater understanding of the value of nature-based wellbeing resulting greater investment in opportunities.
- There is increased efficiency, strength and resilience for the delivery of nature-based wellbeing initiatives.
- There is a better understanding of needs, requirements and motivation to delivery population health management through engagement in nature for wellbeing.

- There is enhanced capacity and sustainability of nature-based opportunities by upskilling activity deliverers, filling gaps in provision and investigating opportunities for long term sustainability.

Next Steps

Collaboration development

- Invite Stakeholders to join HAND mailing list - <http://eepurl.com/hxbchD>
- Develop detailed work plan.
- Recruit HAND administrator.
- Develop Terms of reference and recruitment process for Steering Group.
- Set up Steering Group.
- Apply for development and pilot delivery funding.
- Develop communications plan.
- Undertake initial research.

Draft HAND Structure

