

Green Health

The Beach House

Programme Strategy 2023 – 2028



NHS Lothian | Green
Charity | Health



Community gardens on the NHS estate are places that build connections with people and nature

Photo by Chris Watt Photography

NHS Lothian Charity

Green **Health** Programme Strategy **2023 - 2028**

Our vision

By fully realising the potential of the NHS outdoor estate, we contribute to better physical and mental health and wellbeing for the people of Edinburgh and the Lothians. Our greenspace enhancements and activities benefit patients, visitors, staff and communities, and help fight climate change and biodiversity loss.





Wildflowers at the Western General Hospital are increasing biodiversity and creating more welcoming places for people

Introduction

In June 2019, NHS Lothian published the first health board led greenspace and health strategy in Scotland. The core aim of the strategy was to maximise 'Lothian's Natural Health Service'.

The NHS in Scotland has a duty as a public body to further the conservation of biodiversity (Nature Conservation (Scotland) Act)¹ and meet the ambitious climate change targets set out in the NHS Scotland Climate Emergency and Sustainability Strategy². NHS Lothian is in a unique position where 81 hectares (46% of its estate) are greenspace, affording huge potential to use the estate as a health asset for patients, staff and the local community, and to encourage nature-based health activities.

NHS Lothian Charity's Green Health Programme Team leads this work, collaborating across the system from strategic to site and garden level, to advocate for change and demonstrate its impact. We deliver non-clinical services either directly or in partnership with third sector providers, and fund projects to unlock the potential of NHS Lothian's greenspaces as health assets.

Our work is person-centred, putting the needs of the people we work with at the core of all our activities. This approach has proven key to unlocking the benefit for all. There is a growing evidence base that demonstrates the connection between greenspaces and nature and improved health and wellbeing³. The strongest evidence concerns the links between contact with greenspaces and improved mental health and wellbeing, stress reduction and the alleviation of dementia symptoms.

1. Guidance Note - Biodiversity Duty Explained, Nature Scot 2020
2. NHS Scotland Climate Emergency and Sustainability Strategy
3. Evidence, review and synthesis, NHS Lothian Charity: Green Health website



Alexander McCall Smith performs his work for patients, staff and volunteers in the Cyrenian's Royal Edinburgh Hospital garden

Photo by Cyrenians

Research has also found that greenspaces may help mitigate the health impacts of socio-economic inequality and, as such, are a powerful public health tool. In response to this evidence, we provide universal services with activity that spans the whole patient pathway from prevention through acute care then into recovery and beyond. We provide most intensive support to:

- Patients living with a disability, long-term health condition and/or mental health issues.
- Staff groups under high levels of stress and those with low levels of physical activity.
- Communities in areas of high deprivation or low environmental quality.

The scope and potential of the green health agenda is such that it cannot be delivered in isolation, so our role as a charity is as an instigator, innovator and partner. As an instigator, we increase the volume and depth of engagement with greenspace across all user groups. As an innovator, pilots and tests of change are key to our approach, and we work to embed effective ideas and create long-term models of delivery. As a partner, we inform, educate and advocate, to increase understanding of the importance of greenspaces, and nature as a tool for health.

We aim to be a catalyst for long-term, impactful and sustainable change in greenspace use and management across Lothian, enhancing patient experience and care and having a positive impact on the health of people and the planet.



Assumptions and principles

The following assumptions and principles are the change mechanisms at the core of our programme and things that we rely on being in place to contribute to the outcomes we seek.

- Use of the NHS outdoor estate by patients, staff, visitors and the wider community will be encouraged.
- When NHS sites are redeveloped or refurbished, the existing range and provision of on-site green health activities should continue in the new development with facilities and access as good as, or better than, those on the existing/old site.
- Opportunities will be actively sought to maximise use of the outdoor estate for formal and informal green health activities and services, including access and links with surrounding greenspaces and green networks.

Evidence base

Mental Health – There is a growing, robust body of evidence which shows a positive association between a) population level exposure to natural environments and b) individual use of natural environments, alongside a variety of positive mental health outcomes (e.g. perception of wellbeing and mood)⁴.

Physical Health – Literature reporting the positive relationship between natural environments and physical health continues to emerge. There is evidence for the interventional impact of nature exposure on the immune system, perinatal health, and physical activity behaviour change⁵.

4. Seers, H., Mughal, R., and Chatterjee, H. 2022. Links between natural environments and mental health: evidence briefing. EIN065. Natural England

5. Seers, H., Mughal, R., and Chatterjee, H. 2022. Links between natural environments and physical health: evidence briefing. EIN066. Natural England



Photo by Chris Watt Photography

Children and Young People – Systematic reviews have found that the strongest evidence is for links between nature exposure and increased levels of physical activity, lower levels of obesity, and improvements in mental health and cognitive performance⁶.

Inequalities – There are distinct inequalities in the access and use of greenspace that prevent some people from experiencing the health benefits associated with use of outdoor space. These include variation by age, sex, socio-economic status and ethnicity⁷.



6. Seers, H., Mughal, R., and Chatterjee, H. 2022. How the natural environment can support children and young people: evidence briefing. EIN067. Natural England.

7. S&SR Environment and Spaces Group Report: COVID-19 Green and Open Space Use in Spring 2021 (Wave 3) Priorities for pandemic recovery



Our impact so far

An independent evaluation of the Programme in 2021 found that an impressive range of developments have been completed across different sites and of different scales. Our approach has leveraged relationships with third sector partners and with Local Authority leads, particularly when connecting with neighbouring greenspaces. Through the Programme's Green Health Prescribing development project, an understanding of how best to do this work in personalised, practical, evidence-based and sustainable ways was achieved through careful co-production.



Case study:

Transforming an abandoned space

A revitalisation effort at Access Place is turning a neglected area into a garden for both staff and service users. The GP practice supports Edinburgh's homeless community and is creating a safe, accessible garden to use as a space to engage in activities proven to enhance mental and physical health. For staff, it means having a resource to improve patient care. NHS Lothian Charity has supported this project with advice, funding and connections to our partners such as Cyrenians, Edinburgh & Lothians Greenspace Trust (ELGT) and the University of Edinburgh.

-  The garden creates a space where we hope people can be included, and actually maybe it can even be a gateway for people accessing nature in a more positive way."
Dr Katie Hawkins, GP, Access Place
-  The staff have a space as well, we do a challenging job with challenging situation and having a space where we can reflect and process what's gone on has been really beneficial to people's mental health."
Deb Bradnock, Partnership Support, Access Place



Photo by John Sinclair



Photo by Mark Haddon

Wildlife at the Western
 "These flowers really brighten up my day."
 This wildflower meadow has been planted by the Wildlife at the Western team. It will continue to grow and flourish. Thank you to all the volunteers who have helped to create this space. For more information visit www.wildlifeatthewestern.org.uk

Case study:

Developing a sustainable activity pathway

A three year project led by the Cyrenians at the Royal Edinburgh Hospital is establishing a sustainable, person-centred activity pathway to use nature to improve patient health and wellbeing. Through volunteer garden buddies and regular 1:1 sessions, they are supporting people to access the gardens and unlock their health benefits. From the first connections with nature on the wards through to ongoing support on discharge, the project is empowering people to move towards positive more stable futures. Working with staff and partners across the site, the project is embedding this pathway for the future.

It keeps me on the straight and narrow! No seriously it gives me routine. If I keep working, keep my routine it keeps me away from all the bad things. It's working for me."

Participant, Green Health Activity

It's amazing to see the guys really come out of themselves, look after each other and take pride in their work. Alex who came today had not left Milestone for three weeks (and hardly got out of bed he was so depressed) so to see him participating and enjoying himself was just brilliant."

Feedback from a staff member from Milestone House

Case study:

Making the most of the NHS estate

The Western General Hospital is a very busy acute hospital with limited greenspace, however, we have been supporting teams across the site to make the most of it for both patient and staff wellbeing and biodiversity. Through the Wildlife at the Western project, we have worked with the Grounds and Gardens team to highlight the areas of wildflowers they have created and communicate the benefits to the wider hospital community. In the medicine for the elderly wards, we have piloted green health activity with RSPB Scotland, and are evaluating its impact. Finally, we have worked with the Capital Project team to consider how green infrastructure can be integrated into the site's masterplan and major future developments such as the Edinburgh Cancer Centre.

I believe nature is very humbling and can often make me remember how much goes on around me. It gives me peace, when a world so full of life can be so silent, it is tranquil for me. Nature connection has reminded me how to look after my health."

NHS Lothian staff member reflection

I thought that the areas currently being managed as a perennial wildflower meadows were looking great. Really great work getting those established."

Scott Shanks, Conservation Officer, RSPB Scotland

Timeline

Key achievements and successes since the Programme was established:

2019

Greenspace and Health Strategic Framework **launched**.

Recruited a programme manager and secured annual budget.

Appointed **Green Health Champion** and formed advisory group.

2020

Programme **mainstreamed** as a key focus area of the NHS Lothian Sustainable Development Framework.

Golden threads for **Green Social Prescribing** developed.

A&E Staff wellbeing courtyard created at the Royal Infirmary of Edinburgh.

576 patients took part in **nature-based activities** with the Cyrenians at the Royal Edinburgh, Astley Ainslie and Midlothian Community Hospitals.

2021

80ha of greenspace identified in biodiversity audit and **natural capital account**.

Green Health Network is started and **80 NHS Lothian staff** and partners join up.

Royal Edinburgh Hospital Greenspace management plan leads to the first **green flag award**.

Longer term funding agreed with partners to deliver patient and staff activity.

Delivered **emergency active travel interventions** with funding support from Sustrans.

Launched **climate challenge grants** that staff could apply for up to £5,000 to improve biodiversity.

2022

Over **200** patients take part in **regular green health activities** across 5 major sites.

Key **biodiversity indicators** have been included in the Lothian Performance Recovery Programme and Remobilisation Plans.

Influence key parts of NHS Scotland climate emergency and sustainability strategy: 2022-2026.

Secured £362,500 external and match funding for patient and community activities at St John's, Astley Ainslie and East Lothian Community Hospitals.

Increased **core capacity** of the team with project managers and designer.

Have produced **3** greenspace management plans, created **6** new patient and staff wellbeing spaces and refurbished **7** gardens.

Built partnerships for research and practice with University of Edinburgh, Queen Margret University and University of Stirling.

Launched the **Green Health Microsite** and newsletter to improve information sharing and promote our work.

Strengthened links between the three NHS Lothian Community Gardens to increase activity and make better connections between NHS Lothian patients and staff.

Built a network of **delivery partners** including Cyrenians, Sustaining Dunbar, ELGT, Volunteer Edinburgh, Artlink, The Conservation Volunteers, RSPB, University of Edinburgh, Queen Margaret University.

Enabling factors

To continue to be a leader and innovator in Green Health, four key, interdependent enabling factors need to be in place:

Leadership

The work we do can be complex requiring input from both individuals and departments. We, therefore, need to **collaborate** effectively to **influence** others and be open to change.

We need to open up new possibilities and create opportunities to do things differently by promoting and supporting **creativity** and **innovation**.

Best practice is the cornerstone of our approach and identifying and celebrating it will help us to inspire and motivate others.

Resources

A **team bringing specialist knowledge, skills and experience** is needed to develop and deliver projects and support NHS Lothian staff and services to use resources most effectively.

Appropriate resources, including budget, are vital to the successful delivery of enhancement projects and multi-year activities.

We share much of our infrastructure with our strategic partner, NHS Lothian. The added value agenda of the Programme can require a tailored method, distinctive from NHS Lothian standard approaches. **Effective processes** need to be codesigned to ensure an agreed end result, quality, added value, and timely delivery.

Our work needs to contribute to and inform **national and local policy and frameworks** developments.

Partnership

Partnerships with **internal and external** colleagues are key to the Green Health programme's success in delivering sustainable change for places and people.

Co-design and collaboration are integral to the Programme's approach to partnership, building consensus and ownership to maximise impact.

Our external partners will bring expertise and resources that allow for an increase in the scope and diversity of the Programme while maintaining **best practice**.

Internally, partnerships with Estates and Facilities, Ground and Gardens, Voluntary Services, clinical colleagues and patients will enable **creative and innovative** delivery of complex person-centred projects.

We may award **strategic grants** to partners to seed fund developments or pilot tests of change.

Communication

Communicating the Programme's impact is important to ensure its visibility and reach. A comprehensive communications plan is needed to **inform and influence** our wide range of stakeholders.

An outcomes-based **evaluation framework** needs to be consistently applied across direct and commissioned projects to demonstrate impact and facilitate learning and quality improvement.

Evaluation and learning are key to ensuring that the Green Health programme unlocks the potential of both the natural assets of NHS Lothian's estate and also NHS Lothian's staff team.



Outcome framework

Green Health uses the following framework to achieve the final goals set out in NHS Lothian Charity's Strategic Plan:

Enabling Factors:

What needs to be in place to achieve our objectives and final goals

Activities:

Core activities we deliver and fund across NHS Lothian

Intermediate Outcomes:

Changes we want to see for our beneficiaries

Priority Objectives:

Final Goal:

The overall impact we are trying to achieve

- Resources
- Internal & external partnerships
- Innovation & creativity
- Best practice
- Informing & influencing
- Co-design & collaboration
- Team, knowledge, skills & experience
- Appropriate resources & effective processes
- Strategic grant giving
- Evaluation & learning
- Framework & policy
- Partnership
- Leadership
- Communication

- Green Health participatory activity:** Opportunities for patients and staff to engage in and with greenspace.
- Greenspace enhancement projects:** Unlock potential through the development of high quality, accessible, multifunctional greenspaces.
- Embedding systems change:** Support the development of strategic systems-based approaches such as green social prescribing.
- Network and champions:** Develop and support a staff Green Health Network and team of champions for learning, sharing and delivery.
- Partnership development:** Long-term, sustainable outcomes-based relationships with key delivery partners.
- Learning and training:** Support others to increase knowledge and upskill through briefings, guides, training and research.
- Leadership, advocacy & advice:** Provide expert strategic and operational leadership and advice. Advocate for recognition of benefits and investment needed.

- A more strategic approach to greenspace management on major sites.
- Patients, staff and communities have greater awareness of and access to NHS Lothian's outdoor estate.
- Patients and staff have increased confidence and motivation.
- Patients, staff and communities experience an increased connection to nature.
- Patients, staff and communities experience reduced social isolation.
- Patients and staff feel included and involved.
- Patients and staff have improved mental and physical wellbeing through contact with the natural environment.
- Improved knowledge, skills and confidence to implement greenspace activity and improvement projects.

- NHS Lothian outdoor estate is recognised and fully utilised as a health asset for patients, staff and communities.
- Improved staff wellbeing and professional development.
- Patients supported throughout their healthcare journey from acute illness to recovery.
- Reduced health inequalities.
- Greater climate change adaptation, mitigation and biodiversity.

- Enhanced experience and care for patients in hospital and their communities.
- Have a positive impact on health in Lothians.



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