

## Towards a Mentally Flourishing Scotland – SNH comments (19<sup>th</sup> March 2008)

### 1. Background

1.1 SNH works with Scotland's people to care for the natural heritage. We recognise that the condition of the natural heritage and people's awareness, understanding and use of it can contribute to better physical and mental health and well-being outcomes.

1.2 Our draft Corporate Strategy establishes 'Delivering health and well-being' as one of our strategic priorities. Working in partnership with Scottish government and a range of national and local partners SNH can contribute to better health and well-being in 3 main ways:

- **Supporting provision** of a high quality environment and opportunities for outdoor activities through better placemaking and the development of green infrastructure (such as greenspace, path networks, and wild land)
- **Increasing participation** in outdoor activities, and recognition of its health benefits, particularly for young people and disadvantaged groups.
- **Caring for the resource** by working with others to make the outdoor environment more attractive, richer in wildlife and accessible to all.

1.3 There is increasing recognition of the role of the outdoor environment in both maintaining people's mental well-being, and in recovery from mental ill health. A recent systematic literature review examining evidence of the health impacts of greenspace concluded that;

'it is the restorative effects of greenspace and contact with nature where the evidence appears to be most compelling'<sup>1</sup>.

In taking forward our work on health and well-being we aim to;

- increase recognition of the role of the natural heritage in supporting better physical and mental health and well-being;
- develop closer links in SNH's policy, advice and projects between the natural heritage and health and well-being; and
- undertake more activity with explicit and measurable health and well-being outcomes

1.4 The development of an action plan for mental health improvement is therefore of interest to us. We have set out below opportunities we have identified under the three questions posed in the discussion document. Where relevant these are cross referenced to paragraph numbers from the discussion document (in brackets). We would welcome the opportunity to discuss these further.

### 2. What shared objectives and actions for *local delivery* should be made for 2008-11 which would be deliverable, measurable and valuable?

2.1 SNH helps provide better environmental quality for people, and is committed to developing a clearer role in addressing disadvantage. More specifically we can

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<sup>1</sup> This literature review was contracted by SNH, PHS Health Scotland and Greenspace Scotland as part of the development of a Health Impact Assessment toolkit for greenspace.

help address inequalities in terms of access to natural greenspace and recreational opportunities which promote physical activity and better mental well-being (1.1). As part of the wider public service delivery mechanism we can help support improved public well-being (3.2), and can help address wider factors affecting people's mental health and well-being, especially the outdoor, green environment (5.1). We therefore have a role in supporting activities to;

- *promote* better mental health (5.3, bullet 1) by addressing risk factors such as poor quality environments and poor physical health; and
- *support* improvements to people's quality of life (5.3 bullet 3) by ensuring equality of opportunity to recreational and other activities.

Activities which promote involvement in local action, for example through volunteering, and involvement in decision making, are another area where environmental organisations have an important role.

- 2.2 SNH, and other environmental organisations in the statutory and voluntary sectors are already working to improve quality of life from early years to later life in both rural and urban settings (6.2). For early years there is a need to make better links between the programmes promoting outdoor learning and programmes promoting health and well-being in schools (6.4). SNH has an important advocacy role here, and can help shape delivery at a local level.
- 2.3 There should be focussed effort to develop local partnerships to deliver projects linking mental well-being and outdoor activity. This should include more targeted referral schemes for people suffering from mental ill health as well as more broadly focussed work to sustaining good mental well-being. SNH will work with wider stakeholders and agencies to develop agreed commitments for delivery at local level (7.3), and in some places may, in partnership and with guidance and support, offer opportunities for community referrals or social prescribing schemes (9.6). While it is not possible for this to become a significant component of our work, some relevant SNH staff at NNR level and elsewhere, could participate in suitable training to enable the organisation to become more mental health-literate and recovery-orientated (8.3.3).
- 2.4 Given the important role of physical health as a major determinant of mental well-being, and the increasingly acknowledged role of natural greenspace as a restorative environment it would be helpful to increase our knowledge of local resources for physical/social activity outdoors. Mapping of greenspace and core paths is underway, and it will be important to improve promotion of these resources - both to key professionals and people more generally - to encourage more physical activity. To help achieve this we need to build on, and improve coordination of, national and local promotional initiatives and ensure that efforts are targeted and that synergies are achieved. One example would be to target the establishment of new referral/opt in schemes – such as BTCV Scotland's green gym – particularly in areas where risk factors are high, and mental well-being at a population level is poor (8.5).
- 2.5 We need to develop, and support the dissemination of, tools which enable relevant professionals to take action where they can. One example is the development of Health Impact Assessment guidance for greenspace. This will be published in April this year by Greenspace Scotland, with the support of

NHS Health Scotland and SNH. It aims to encourage action to build health benefits into greenspace activity. It will be most effective where applied by a partnership which brings together greenspace and health expertise. Local authorities and health boards need to encourage and support use of the guidance, and help support its application and dissemination. Other tools to support the development of further action on maximising the health benefits of outdoor environments could be developed for other settings, such as hospital grounds, schools or workplaces. SNH could help advise on these.

### **3. What *national supports* would help local areas meet these objectives and actions?**

- 3.1 Scottish Government should work with other partners at a National level to support awareness raising of the health and well-being benefits of outdoor activity, and contact with, the natural heritage. This should include both focussed information/events targeted at key professionals in the healthcare and natural heritage sector and broader promotional campaigns aimed at encouraging participation in outdoor activities by the wider public. The Paths for All Partnership, which undertakes both Outdoor Access and Paths to Health work, could be well placed to promote the health and well-being benefits of activity in the natural heritage and to facilitate work to achieve these. Participation in health walks achieves a range of physical, mental and community health outcomes, and we to look at how these can be made more explicit and achieved in practice. Similarly our work with Greenspace Scotland should examine in more detail the ways in which greenspace can be planned and managed to achieve a range of health benefits – see 2.5.
- 3.2 SNH and others will need advice from health sector partners in promoting it's services and making the right connections, i.e. engaging with the relevant partners at the right level (9.4). We would welcome support and/or advice on joint marketing opportunities, national campaigns and use of the media in promoting the role of the environment in improving mental health, and addressing health inequalities. Some areas in which we see a clear role for the natural heritage sector are in assisting recovery programmes through active participation – through referral schemes as well as less structured projects – and increasing access to quality greenspaces in rural and urban settings (10.1.3), including improving the environment in some of Scotland's most deprived areas.
- 3.3 Nationally co-ordinated action to share good practice and support the development of knowledge and skills to support the embedding of this into practice more broadly is important. SNH (in partnership with the Healthy Environment Network) will issue a publication bringing together published research and case studies on health and the natural heritage in April/May this year, and will run a Sharing Good Practice event on Creating Healthy Places on the 25<sup>th</sup> November. We would welcome the involvement of other partners in these. We would also be keen to participate in training programmes for relevant healthcare and natural heritage professionals.

- 3.4 A series of National demonstration projects – perhaps established through a national call - would also be a good way to raise awareness, build skills for delivery, and develop the evidence base. We would be very keen to work with Government to support the development of partnership projects which link access to the natural environment and outdoor activities to improving mental health and well-being. These should be monitored and evaluated using an agreed outcome focussed framework – see 4.1.
- 3.5 Drawing on recent NICE guidelines on built and natural environments for physical activity the Scottish Government and others should develop SIGN guidelines on environment and mental health and well-being. Such guidance should critically examine the evidence base, identify gaps in knowledge and identify actions to improve mental health and reduce inequalities. Actions identified should focus on both creating places that promote good mental health, and the proactive use of outdoor environments in tackling mental ill-health.
- 4. How can *progress* (locally and nationally) be tracked and performance assessed?**
- 4.1 While some measures available at present further work is needed to develop outcomes and outcome measures that will help track progress. Just as action is needed across a range of fronts, so measures need to be developed to reflect where progress is needed. The requirement for local authorities to develop open space strategies based on a comprehensive audit of both quality and quantity of open space will enable more detailed assessment of the quality of local environments across Scotland. We need to use these to monitor action to improve poor quality environments.
- 4.2 To help support action to support the Government’s key performance indicator on increasing visits to the outdoors, SNH already gathers data on participation in outdoor activities in a variety of settings, and we will continue to measure levels of participation in partnership with others. Our goal must be to increase levels of participation, and we need to track levels of participation across socio-economic and equalities groups. These broad measures must be supported by health outcomes and outcome indicators associated with specific activities, and we are currently working with others to develop these.
- 4.3 Through the Green Exercise Partnership SNH will work with partners to develop an agreed framework for monitoring and evaluating the health impacts of key areas of our work, including green exercise, volunteering, placemaking and outdoor learning. This would be linked to the development of clear health outcomes to be promoted through grants and partnership working. The Framework will include outcomes and outcome measures of better mental health and well-being, and these must be linked to national performance measures. We would welcome discussion with the National Programme Team on the development of this Framework.
- 4.2 We are also working with Greenspace Scotland and Health Scotland on research to identify health outcomes for greenspace regeneration. This work

will be completed in August 2008, and will help us work with local government and others to set clear health outcomes for projects which aim to improve, and encourage increased use of, greenspace.

## **5. Relevant facts and figures**

- SNH provided £7 million towards Greenspace action last year.
- We currently support 48 Local Nature Reserves – many of which are close to Scotland's urban populations. We also provide funding for Country and Regional Parks, rangers and long distance routes.
- Concordat funding of BTCV and their green gym – figures illustrate 23% of people using green gyms have specific physical or psychological health problems. Operating in 13 local authorities.
- SNH has grant funded a great number of community path networks and associated infrastructure some of which are used by Paths to Health and other local authority walking groups.

## **6. Contact for more information**

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