

Position Statement on Landscape and Health and Wellbeing

September 2020



Scotland's
Landscape
Alliance



About Scotland's Landscape Alliance

Scotland's Landscape Alliance (SLA) is a grouping of over 60 organisations with a common interest in raising awareness of the importance of Scotland's landscapes to climate resilience and nature, our economic performance and public health and wellbeing and, in doing this, gain public and political support for the better care of Scotland's landscape and places to maximise future benefits.

Our vision is a Scotland where the benefits of landscape are recognised, and where landscape is designed and cared for to strengthen its role in delivering Scotland's national outcomes, the UN Sustainable Development Goals and the principles of the European Landscape Convention.

The purpose of this paper is to set out the Scottish Landscape Alliance's view on the role of landscape in respect of increasing our resilience to the environmental challenges we face in Scotland and globally. It is informed by the work of SLA members.

Key Messages

- Good landscape contributes to improved health and wellbeing, including in our poorest, most deprived areas and most vulnerable groups. The benefits of being in landscape are not limited to improvements associated with physical activity; using the outdoors improves mental wellbeing and encourages community cohesion.
- Poor landscape and deprivation often occur together, meaning that those in greatest need are least able to access quality outdoor spaces. This contributes to health inequalities in Scotland.
- Action at a range of landscape scales is required to improve air quality and reduce flooding and urban heating; effects of our changing climate that are directly and indirectly impacting on societal and individual health and wellbeing.
- Greater numbers of people could benefit from landscape for health and wellbeing but cannot do so due to under-investment in design, implementation and stewardship of their local landscapes.
- Communities can feel that local landscapes important to them are at risk and that they have little say in what happens to the facilities and services they offer.
- Landscape quality is not routinely or consistently measured and reported. This is due to variable coverage, methodologies and frequency of collection resulting in a lack of good quality data. Data can also be hard to access.
- The Scottish Landscape Alliance has a range of recommendations for its members and stakeholders to address these issues.

Understanding the Issue

What do we mean by landscape?

Landscape is about the relationship between people and place. It provides the setting for our day-to-day lives and is an important part of the quality of life for people everywhere: our urban areas, countryside, coasts and waterways, in areas recognised as being of outstanding beauty, as well as everyday spaces. Landscapes are an essential component of people's surroundings, an expression of diversity of our shared cultural and natural heritage and a foundation for identity, now and in the future

The Landscape Instituteⁱ sets out 5 principles which determine healthy landscapes, these are places that:

- Improve air, water and soil quality, incorporating measures that help us to either adapt to climate change or mitigate its impact on us.
- Help reduce health inequalities and promote healthy lifestyles.
- Relax people, increase social interaction and reduce anti-social behaviour, isolation and stress.
- Optimise opportunities for working, learning and development.
- Are restorative, uplifting and healing for both physical and mental health conditions.

The World Health Organizationⁱⁱ has identified some of the characteristics of a health-giving landscape. These include:

- Accessible, safe and good quality – there is greater use and levels of physical activity if people perceive landscape to be safe, aesthetically pleasing, have lots of amenities, is well maintained and is easy to get to and close to home.
- Bigger is better – the size of landscape is likely to influence the levels and types of activity people undertake within it. It seems that large areas of urban greenspace, for example, are more beneficial in terms of physical activity behaviour compared to smaller areas.
- Facilities encourage more activity – park facilities such as marked/paved trails, water areas and playgrounds are effective at increasing levels of physical activity.
- Trees matter – greater tree cover and canopy density provide greater health benefit as long as they are maintained.
- Naturalness is important – the evidence suggests that being in more natural environments (like broadleaf woodland, arable fields and horticulture, improved grassland, saltwater and coastal landscapes) result in greater health gain.

There is now a wealth of good quality evidence demonstrating the positive impact that natural environments can have on physical and mental health. The World Health organisation conducted a large review of the evidence in 2016¹ and identified a number of positive health benefits associated with urban greenspace.

These include:

- Improved mental health and cognitive function
- Reduced cardiovascular morbidity
- Reduced prevalence of type 2 diabetes
- Improved pregnancy outcomes
- Reduced overall mortality.

There is also emerging evidence that exposure to nature has significant therapeutic benefits so could be used as part of the treatment for some conditionsⁱⁱⁱ.

What health challenges are we facing?

The global pandemic of COVID-19 has clearly shown our basic human need to be able to access the outdoors to exercise and socialise. However, the delivery of health-giving landscape lags behind the data and there is much we need to do to support action, especially for those in greatest need.



Health inequalities

Health inequalities are the unfair and avoidable differences in people's health across social groups and between different population groups. They represent thousands of unnecessary premature deaths every year in Scotland, and for men in the most deprived areas nearly 25 fewer years are spent in 'good health' than men in the least deprived areas; for women this is 22 years.

Those living in areas of greater deprivation are more likely to be exposed to harmful environmental factors, such as poor air quality, and less likely to have access to beneficial

ones, such as greenspace⁴. At present those suffering the worst health outcomes (i.e. the most deprived) have less access and exposure to health enhancing environments and more exposure to health damaging environments. You can read more about degraded landscapes in the Scottish Landscape Alliance Position Statement on Landscape, Land Use and Economy^{iv}.

For some health outcomes, particularly mental health, research shows that greenspaces can help mitigate the health impacts of socio-economic inequality^v. There is evidence to suggest that this is also the case for all-cause and circulatory disease mortality^{vi}. In other words, the benefits of greenspace are greater for those worse off in society and landscape can help narrow the gap in health outcomes caused by socio-economic deprivation.

Under investment

We need investment in our everyday landscape, our urban parks and greenspaces, if we are to address health inequalities and deliver wider health and social outcomes. Landscape requires management and ongoing maintenance of a range of good quality facilities, including seats, toilets, cafes, play and sports facilities to provide greater choice for everyone. The presence of nature and opportunities to grow food also encourage individual and community participation. Research from Sheffield University highlights the importance of facilities to improve mental wellbeing and reduce feelings of isolation and loneliness^{vii}.

Under investment leads to the presence of overgrown vegetation, graffiti, vandalism, litter, noise, pollution and dog fouling. According to the WHO research, these have negative associations with park use and physical activity. This is because when places are not looked after use drops and for those people who did use these areas, they experience increased levels of anxiety due to concerns of personal safety or fear of crime.

To maximise the health outcomes, public parks and urban greenspace need to be actively looked after. This requires the presence of parks staff and other community infrastructure to encourage greater use and better engagement^{viii}.



Climate change

Climate change is and will continue to impact on public and personal health and wellbeing even as we take urgent action to adapt to and mitigate its impacts. Landscape will be key to our approaches going forward.

At a landscape scale, this will require more new forests and woodlands and management of existing woodlands and peatlands to act as carbon stores and to hold rainfall to slow the flow of water into rivers and burns. In the urban environment, we will need to invest in urban woodlands and green infrastructure, including green roofs, green walls and sustainable urban drainage systems. This new form of infrastructure, which will also bring more nature into our cities and towns, presents opportunities to improve urban landscape including vacant and derelict land.

Resulting improvements to air quality and control of summer temperatures will improve outcomes for those with respiratory diseases, whilst measures to limit flooding will reduce anxiety and depression for those in flood areas.

You can read more about this topic in the Scottish Landscape Alliance Position Statement on Landscape and Resilience to Environmental Challenges^{ix}.

Landscape and community

Recent research commissioned by the National Trust for Scotland^x has highlighted the importance of nature and natural places, growing and gardening, and architecture and built heritage (all aspects of landscape) to people surveyed from across Scotland. The research highlights how participating in cultural activity provides opportunities to increase mental wellbeing, strengthen social networks and increase the likelihood of physical activity.



In 2014, the Scottish Government commissioned a large-scale Green health review ^{xi} of the relationship between greenspace and whether investments in the environment could be targeted better to enhance public health and wellbeing. The research conclusions include:

“Individuals, representatives and community officers all expressed desire for communities to have greater responsibility for managing areas of greenspace for community benefit and in delivering locally identified priorities. This is consistent with the development of community planning.

Policy areas are increasingly conceptualising key issues of equalities in the access, use and management of greenspace in ways that should result in better public health and wellbeing. In practice, implementation should ensure that the contribution of greenspace to public health and wellbeing becomes a key component in Scottish public policy.”

It is true that we have excellent policies and tools, like the Place Standard, to assist with engagement but the lived reality is that the true value of our landscape is poorly understood (especially at a local authority level) and investment in landscape is not a priority (parks and green infrastructure delivery and management are not a statutory function) and local people have very little say in their local greenspace^{xii}.

By recognising the importance of landscape and naturalness to health and by investing in place, using traditional and innovative funding models, we can do much to improve Scotland’s health and wellbeing. This is why we are advocating for the delivery and management of our landscape (including parks, greenspace and green infrastructure) to become a statutory duty for local authorities.





What the SLA is going to do about landscape and health and wellbeing

Tackling Scotland's health issues is a national priority for civic society. We encourage our members to:

1. Deliver our evidence-based communications strategy targeted at and engaging with key decision-makers.
2. Consider how their property and land can be managed and used to improve the health and wellbeing of visitors, workers and local communities.

What we are asking stakeholders to do

3. Define appropriate quality standards and indicators to deliver positive health and wellbeing outcomes.
4. Develop and begin reporting on national indicators for landscape within the National Performance Framework
5. Embed the proper design, management and effective use of all landscapes (rural and urban) into the statutory climate change, biodiversity, health and economic duties of all public sector bodies.
6. Establish and utilise revenue budgets to properly resource the management of public landscape assets to deliver health and wellbeing services and resources to the community and individuals.
7. Develop guidance, expertise and challenge to ensure health outcomes are incorporated into relevant landscape and place-based policy.
8. Employ landscape architects within local authorities and invest in staff training to support better decision-making about landscape outcomes. Ensure equitable pay and conditions to help retain committed land-based workers, rangers and community facilitators who manage and connect communities with landscape.
9. Ensure that decisions affecting local landscapes are taken collaboratively with local communities given an equal voice and influence.
10. Promote and support programmes that recognise, accredit and reward good practice in respect of design, delivery, management and use of quality landscape.



Contact Us

For further information on the SLA or to discuss how you can work with the SLA to collaborate and delivering health and wellbeing through landscape and greenspace please contact:

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Supplementary Information

National Outcomes that will be supported through landscapes for health and wellbeing	
Communities	We live in communities that are inclusive, empowered, resilient and safe.
Environment	We value, enjoy, protect and enhance our environment.
Health	We are healthy and active.
Children & Young People	We grow up loved, safe and respected so that we realise our full potential.
Education	We are educated, well skilled and able to contribute to society.

Public Health Priorities that will be supported through landscapes for health and wellbeing	
PHP1	A Scotland where we live in vibrant, healthy and safe places and communities.
PHP3	A Scotland where we have good mental wellbeing.
PHP6	A Scotland where we eat well, have a healthy weight and are physically active.

Definitions	
Landscape scale	A term used to refer to processes or actions that cover a large spatial scale and across multiple land ownerships, usually addressing a range of ecosystem, conservation and/or land use objectives.
Greenspace	<p>Greenspace Scotland definition for greenspace is: <i>“any vegetated land or water within an urban area; this includes:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>parks, gardens, playing fields, children’s play areas, woods and other natural areas, grassed areas, cemeteries and allotments</i> • <i>green corridors like paths, disused railway lines, rivers and canals</i> • <i>derelict, vacant and contaminated land which has the potential to be transformed</i> <p><i>Planning Advice Note 65 on Planning and Open Space^{xiii} sets out a typology of different types of green and open space; an expanded version of this typology was used for the Ordnance Survey Greenspace Map”</i></p>
Green Infrastructure	<p>The European Commission^{xiv} defines green infrastructure as: <i>“a strategically planned network of natural and semi-natural areas with other environmental features designed and managed to deliver a wide range of ecosystem services such as water purification, air quality, space for recreation and climate mitigation and adaptation. This network of green (land) and blue (water) spaces can improve environmental conditions and therefore citizens' health and quality of life. It also supports a green economy, creates job opportunities and enhances biodiversity.”</i></p>
Green Networks	Individual elements of green infrastructure can serve a useful green infrastructure purpose, without being connected. However, when green infrastructure components are linked together to form green networks further combined benefits can be achieved at a strategic level ^{xv} .

References

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- ^{ix} Scotland’s Landscape Alliance- Working Group 2 2020 *Landscape and Resilience to Environmental Challenges - Position Statement*
- ^x Ballantyne J, Hearn D. Scotland’s Culture Strategy: overcoming barriers and unlocking benefits. National Trust for Scotland. January 2020. <https://s3-eu-west-1.amazonaws.com/ws-nts/Production/assets/downloads/A-Scottish-Culture-Strategy-overcoming-barriers-and-unlocking-benefits-January-2020.pdf?mtime=20200207095412>.
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