

Isle of Wight Public Health Annual Report 2017- 2018

The Island as a health promoting setting and the role of green and blue space on the health of the Island population



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Front cover photograph: St Helens Old Church, the Duver.

Foreword

The Isle of Wight has a great wealth and variety of open spaces – some, such as public parks, are designed and planned, while others, including open down land and coastlines, are natural.

We know that the places where we live have an impact on our health but the importance of shaping these places to promote good health and wellbeing isn't always recognised.

The abundance and accessibility of green and blue space on the Island provides great opportunities for improving the mental and physical health of the population due to the close links between good health and access to the countryside.

With a third of adults on the Island taking less than 30 minutes of moderate intensity activity in a week and higher than average rates of depression and anxiety, promoting the use of these assets and making access to them easy is a vitally important part of improving health outcomes for Island residents.

The report makes recommendations about how we can work together to improve access to these spaces for the benefit of everyone.



Simon Bryant
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Introduction

Numerous research studies show that access to local, quality green space improves the physical and mental health and wellbeing of everyone. The Marmot Review in 2010¹ describes how improving the availability of good quality green spaces across the social gradient will help ameliorate health inequalities. However, a review by the Heritage Lottery Fund identifies the challenges in maintaining the quality of the parks, countryside and coast we use².

The natural environment can be categorised as green or blue space. Green spaces include formal green space – parks and gardens; natural and semi-natural green space – woodland, heath, wetlands, wasteland and derelict land being reclaimed by nature and green corridors – canals, streams, cycle-ways, old railways, lanes and hedges. Blue space refers to water, including rivers and brooks or canals; lakes, reservoirs or ponds with some studies including marshes, estuaries and coastline.

Access to green and blue spaces helps promote physical and mental health and wellbeing through the joint benefits of physical activity and interacting with others. Evidence shows that living in close proximity to green spaces, such as parks and other open spaces, can improve health for the whole population. A WHO report³ evaluated the effects of green spaces on physical activity and their potential to reduce health inequalities. It states that “access to public open space and green areas with appropriate recreation facilities for all age groups is needed to support active recreation”, but recognises that multidisciplinary and inter-sectoral interventions may be needed to support disadvantaged groups where physical activity levels are lowest.

There is also evidence that access to, and engagement with, the natural environment is associated with positive health outcomes, such as improved mental health and a reduced risk of cardiovascular disease. The type of natural environment we access is important. For example we have evidence to show that access to recreational infrastructure, such as parks and playgrounds, is associated with a reduced risk of obesity among adolescents. The benefits of green space are also dependent on its quality; aesthetic park improvements can increase visits and improve physical activity among children and older adults⁴.

This report sets out the opportunities the Island offers with regard to open spaces to improve the health of the population.

¹ Fair Society, Healthy Lives. Marmot Review (2010)

² State of UK Public Parks 2016, Heritage Lottery (2016)

³ Physical Activity Promotion In Socially Disadvantaged Groups: Priorities For Action. Policy Summary. WHO (2013)

⁴ Does Playground Improvement Increase Physical Activity among Children? Journal of Environmental and Public Health (2013)

Green and blue spaces on the Isle of Wight

The Island is uniquely beautiful with a natural boundary of 100 kilometres of diverse and stunning coastline and over 50% of its land mass declared as an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB). It is asset rich in blue and green spaces with the local countryside encompassing open down land, beech woods, coniferous forests, grazing land. Much of this space is accessible with almost 500 miles of sign-posted footpaths and bridleways made up of more than 1,400 public rights of way. These offer ready access to both the countryside and the coast with its sandy beaches, rocky coves, rivers, creeks and estuaries.

The last Green Infrastructure Mapping Study⁵ for the Isle of Wight identified the assets that the Island has and how they combine to create a comprehensive network. These assets include footpaths and bridle ways, cycle paths, leisure facilities, sports/activity clubs.

This study identified the need to consider how to enhance quality of environment, quality of life and quality of place and how to manage development pressures and the implications of development scenarios on existing green spaces, access to green spaces and wider green infrastructure.

More recently and building on this, the AONB Partnership is leading the nomination for making the Isle of Wight England's third UNESCO Biosphere Reserve. Biosphere reserves are areas comprising of terrestrial, marine and coastal ecosystems. Each reserve promotes solutions reconciling the conservation of biodiversity with its sustainable use and managing changes and interactions between social and ecological systems. The decision regarding the Island's Biosphere status is expected in 2019.

The Isle of Wight Council is also part of the Solent Recreation Mitigation Partnership. Together with the South Hampshire district local authorities and other partners the Council will work to mitigate the impact on sensitive habitats around the Solent of any disturbance due to new residential developments.

Why is open space important for health?

The benefits of these green and blues space and the mechanisms by which they work, are varied. Some are the physical benefits from green infrastructure, for example improved air quality, less noise pollution and reduced risks from flooding or heat-waves. There are also benefits to active users of these spaces, whether that's physical recreation or through children interacting with nature. This includes the wide

⁵ Isle of Wight Council (2010) The Isle of Wight's Green Infrastructure Mapping Study

benefits of the coast where it is known that beaches and waterfront parks offer many benefits to people's health⁶.

The impacts on mental wellbeing, social networks and sustainable communities work through a variety of mechanisms and it is in these areas that the strongest evidence is emerging that urban green space can improve the public's health. We know people who live in the areas within our cities and towns that have more green or blue space have better mental health. We know that Island residents have higher than average rates than England of recorded depression and anxiety, long term mental health problems and severe mental illness⁷ and this represents a significant burden of disease. There is good evidence of a positive relationship between levels of urban green and blue space and mental health and wellbeing. Individuals have less mental distress, less anxiety and depression and greater wellbeing when living in urban areas with more greenspace compared with less greenspace. These benefits are independent of socio economic status⁸.

Green and blue space can encourage physical activity which we know can reduce the risk of major illnesses, such as heart disease, stroke, type 2 diabetes and cancer by up to 50% and lower your risk of early death by up to 30%. Physical activity also boosts self-esteem, mood, sleep quality and energy, as well as reducing the risk of stress, depression, dementia and Alzheimer's disease⁹. One study found that people who use public open spaces are three times more likely to achieve recommended levels of physical activity than those who do not use the spaces. Users and potential users prefer nearby, attractive, and larger parks and open spaces¹⁰.

This is important with the challenge to getting everyone who lives on the Island active with one third of adults on the IOW physically inactive (that is they take less than 30 minutes of moderate intensity physical activity per week) significantly worse than the national average (22.7%). Fewer than one in five Year 6 (primary school) pupils are physically active and by Year 10 (secondary school) this significantly decreases to fewer than one in ten. Only 5.6% of Year 10 girls are physically active compared with 14% of boys. This adds up to an estimated cost for IOW health and care services due to physical inactivity alone to over £2.6m a year.

Barriers to accessing green and blue space

Although the Island has a rich diversity of accessible green and blue space we know that many people do not feel able to use these spaces. Overcoming these barriers is

⁶ Hipp JA, Ogunseitan O. Effect of environmental conditions on perceived psychological restorativeness of coastal parks. *Journal of Environmental Psychology*. 2011.

⁷ PHE Public Health Profiles. <https://fingertips.phe.org.uk/profile-group/mental-health/profile/common-mental-disorders/data#page/0/gid/1938132720/pat/46/par/E39000041/ati/152/are/E38000087>

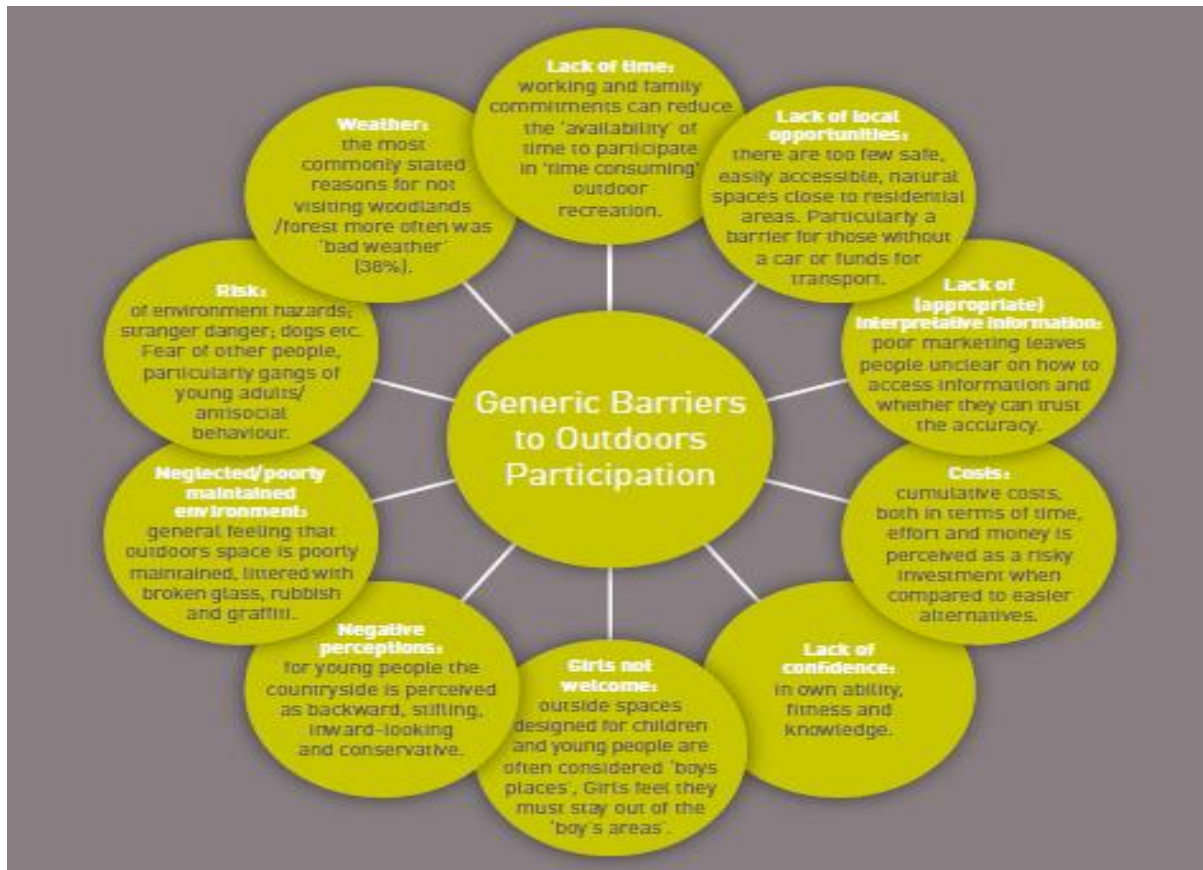
⁸ The Importance of Greenspace for Mental Health. *BJ Psych International* (Nov 2017)

⁹ NHS Health A – Z. <https://www.nhs.uk/live-well/exercise/exercise-health-benefits/>

¹⁰ City Trees, Nature and Physical Activity: A Research Review: *Arborist News* (February 2008)

key to increase access to open space with a key focus being on those groups who are more likely to be physically inactive, including females, older people, disabled people¹¹.

National reports from Sport England (2015)¹² identify a number of barriers for accessing open spaces and all are relevant for the Isle of Wight.



These can be summarised as three main types of barriers:

- **Practical barriers** refer to the physical, medical and economic obstacles to activity that individuals encounter in their daily lives.
- **Knowledge barriers** Knowledge and information gaps about where to go or facilities which may be linked with socio-cultural factors, self-perceptions and the perceptions of others. Evidence suggests that individuals in specific groups (particularly people from ethnic minority communities and older people and people with disabilities may be more adversely affected).
- **Social barriers** refer to specific social and cultural practices, beliefs and traditions within a community or society and how these impact on self-perceptions and the perceptions of others.

¹¹ Active People Survey April 2014 - March 2015

¹² <https://www.sportengland.org/media/3275/outdoors-participation-report-v2-lr-spreads.pdf>

As a way of considering how we might overcome these barriers, examples of projects that encourage people to access open air spaces on the on the Isle of Wight are shown in the brief case studies below.



Isle of Wight Health Walks

The Isle of Wight Health Walks are part of, and accredited to the national Walking for Health Scheme. They are organised and coordinated by the Public Health wellbeing service advisors, helping hundreds of people across the Isle of Wight lead a more active lifestyle. The walks are led by over 40 friendly specially trained volunteers, who are on hand to provide encouragement and support to groups accessing over 400 walks per year with approximately 4500 individual walks being completed.

The aim is to provide walking opportunities to people of different abilities and provide specialist walks for groups including beginners for those who haven't exercised for a period of time, women's groups and people with respiratory conditions. Benefits include pre-arranged risk assessed works were people can feel safer walking in a group and who have the opportunity to make new social relationships.



Wildlife Trust – Bouldner Forest

The Wildlife Trust identifies that many people are increasingly disconnected from the natural world around them. This not only has a detrimental impact on health and wellbeing, but means that future generations may not value, care about or act to support our environment. The Woodland Therapy project uses the natural environment to promote mental health and wellbeing using the Forest School approach. It complements mainstream mental health provision by building self-esteem, self-confidence and independence in adults experiencing mental ill health.

The sessions are run outdoors at the Bouldner Forest Nature Reserve with participants taking part in nature based activities. These sessions offer an opportunity to experience the benefits of nature on their mental health. Sessions are run in small, supervised groups and participants are involved in a variety of nature based activities such as, green woodworking, nature and craft activities, feeding the birds, building camp fires and cooking and sharing an outdoor lunch. Those who are not feeling up to socialising can relax by the campfire or take walk in the forest or on the beach.

From the 1st September 2017- 31st August 2018, 41 sessions were delivered with a total of 52 people attending. Questionnaires collected from participants showed that 84% of respondents felt more:

- Confident about meeting new people,
- Confident about learning new skills and had more self-esteem,
- Enthusiastic about joining in group activities,
- Aware of the effect nature could have on their mental health,

Other results showed that 76% of respondents felt more independent since accessing the project while 53% of respondents reported a decrease in their dependence on support services and 69% of respondents felt more confident about sharing skills with others.

Recommendations

This report highlights the benefits of green and blue space alongside some of the barriers identified to use of the plethora of space the Island has to offer. It is important to ensure that these barriers, where present on the Island, are minimised as much as possible.

Supporting the use of the green and blue spaces would enable people to be healthier and ultimately reduce avoidable costs to the health and care system.

Recommendation 1: Ensure that green space standards are incorporated into local development plans and green space strategies to improve the quality, safety and accessibility of green space and blue space in areas of deprivation

Recommendation 2: Maximise access to high quality green and blue spaces through the planning process for new residential developments to safely provide for parents with young children, people with disabilities and older adults with restricted mobility.

Recommendation 3: Work with schools to encourage opportunities for children and young people in education and community settings to access outdoor space safely.

Recommendation 4: Work to fully understand the local barriers to accessing green space including working with the community safety partnership to understand measures of perceived safety across green spaces

Recommendation 5: Consider how any future Island-wide consultation as part of work on the Regeneration Strategy could include questions about what would motivate people to make greater use of green and blue spaces.