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Biodiversity's contribution to the quality of life

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Number 510

**Biodiversity's contribution to the quality of life
A Research Report for English Nature**

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Environmental Impacts Team

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Acknowledgements

This report covers a wide range of case studies, that have involved many different organisations and a diverse range of community groups and individual volunteers. We hope that this report will go some way towards recognising the efforts of all those involved, and will provide helpful evidence and policy connections for others treading the same paths. The content of this report would be nothing without those efforts, and we apologise for those examples omitted for lack of space.

We are particularly grateful to the following who have helped us at various times:
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Report presentation by Rural Resources

Stephen Lees, Phi Evans
February 2003.

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List of abbreviations used

BAP	Biodiversity Action Plan
BEN	Black Environment Network
BHF	British Heart Foundation
BTCV	British Trust for Conservation Volunteers
CA	Countryside Agency
DEFRA	Department for Food, the Environment and Rural Affairs
EN	English Nature
ESF	European Social Fund
FC	Forestry Commission
HLF	Heritage Lottery Fund
LA21	Local Agenda 21
LSC	Learning and Skills Council
LNR	Local Nature Reserve
NOF	New Opportunities Fund
PCT	Primary Care Trust
PPG	Planning Policy Guidance
RSPB	Royal Society for the Protection of Birds

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1. Introduction

This report follows on from the English Nature report *Revealing the value of nature* [Ref.1], and picks up in more detail references to quality of life. In today's society, and with government looking at joined up thinking, it is important to assess the benefits achieved by the work of English Nature and other conservation organisations over and above that for nature conservation.

The wealth of benefits are summarised in *Revealing the value of nature* in Figure 1.

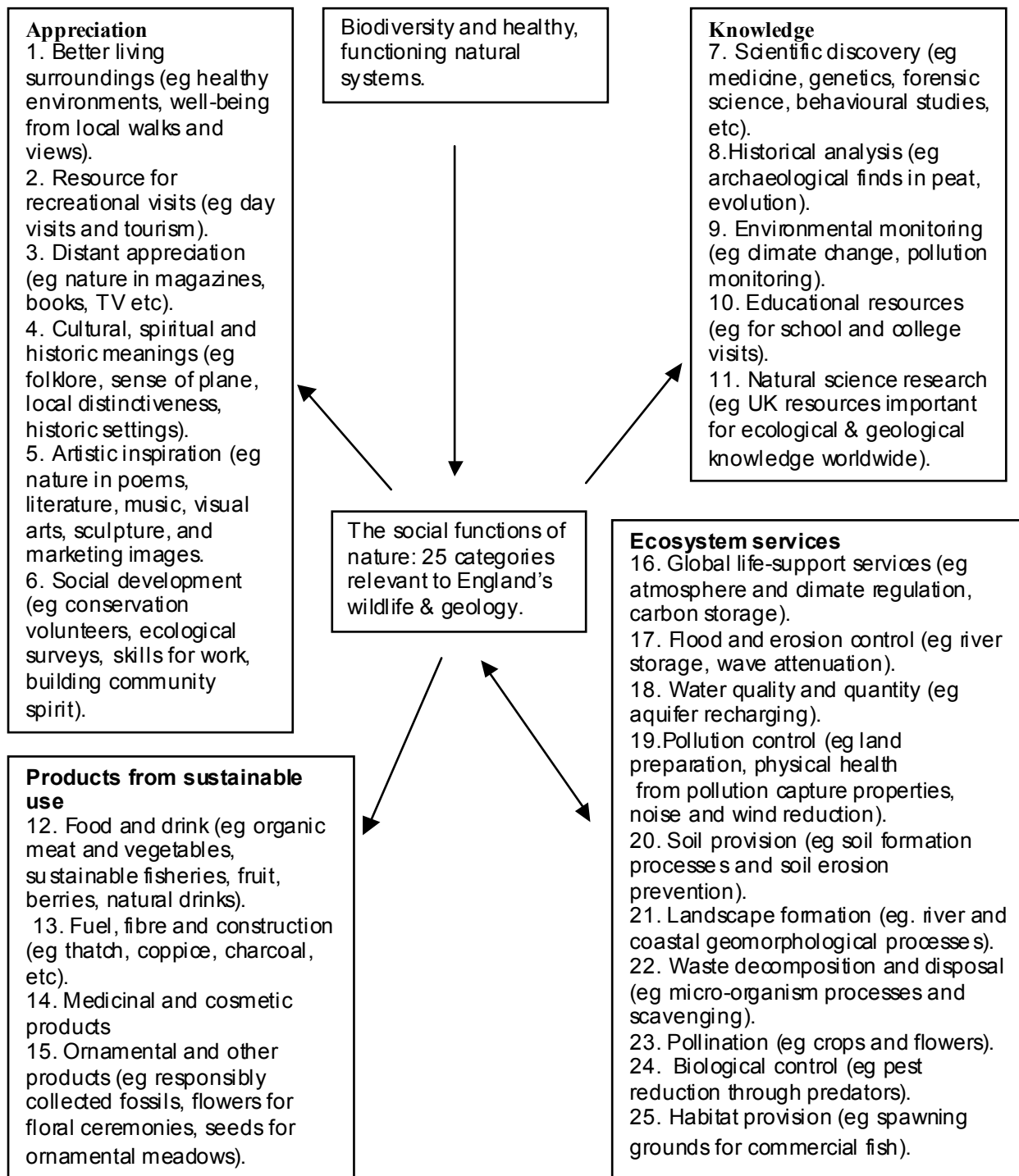


Figure 1: The social functions of nature.

From Ref. 1. Adapted from de Groot (1992); Daily (1997); Constanza et al (1997).

For this report, we were particularly asked to review biodiversity's contribution to better living surroundings, cultural meanings and social development. It is our belief that these areas contain significant overlaps, particularly between culture and community spirit. Exploring culture and sense of place helps develop and sometimes reawaken community spirit. Modern health thinking, and its emphasis on preventative medicine, seeks to look at underlying causes and social deprivation shows a major correlation with poor health. This is explored in the Government White Paper *Saving lives: our healthier nation* [Ref. 4].

We have looked for examples that cross boundaries and show clear quantifiable gains for biodiversity and quality of life. A range of case studies have been given, with references and web sites for further information, as we intend this to be a useful working guide that will stimulate others to replicate and develop further good ideas.

We also intend it to help ensure that the benefits and appreciation of biodiversity conservation are recognised beyond nature conservation organisations and, where appropriate, are incorporated into other sectors of government, including health, housing, art, education and social policy. To fully achieve this, it is also necessary for those working in biodiversity to understand the wider context of their work and be able to relate to, and feed into, these other sectors. Increasing resources have been made available for nature conservation in recent years, and it is incumbent upon nature conservation organisations and groups to demonstrate the wide range of benefits this delivers. In this way, biodiversity will be able to demonstrate its wider role in society and government agendas such as sustainable development, healthy living and social inclusion.

The “Quality of Life Capital” initiative (www.qualityoflifecapital.org.uk), which is being developed with the support of English Nature, the Countryside Agency, the Environment Agency and English Heritage, seeks to provide mechanisms at a local level for assessing the value of biodiversity. It provides an evaluation method across a range of issues, economic, social and environmental, for a given project, in a transparent way. Thus the issues it seeks to deal with are the same as many of those covered in this report.

1.1 Biodiversity at the international level

The importance of biodiversity was recognised internationally, at the 1992 Earth Summit at Rio de Janeiro and the Convention on Biological Diversity. Indeed, the Convention specifically considers how biodiversity promotes human well-being. [Ref. 2] *Sustaining life on earth: how the convention on biological diversity promotes nature and human well-being*, examples quoted include the purification of air and water, and the stabilisation and moderation of the Earth's climate. Cultural and aesthetic benefits are also specifically recognised, and the role of individual citizens is emphasised, through both public participation and education. The report states that the ultimate decision maker for biodiversity is the individual citizen – governments, companies and others have a responsibility to lead and inform, but individual choices made billions of times a day, count the most.

1.2 Biodiversity at the national level

The original UK Biodiversity Action Plan was updated last year [Ref. 3]; this was accompanied by a government statement that UK biodiversity needs to become a part of the development of policy on sustainable communities and urban green space and the built

environment. Within the strategy, there is also a short essay covering the role of biodiversity for recreation, health and well-being. English Nature has called for biodiversity to be recognised as a key test of sustainable development, and state that it is a key contributing factor to quality of life.

1.3 Biodiversity at the local level

Local Biodiversity Plans are being produced primarily at county level, and continue to be published and launched at the time of writing this report. There are also more local plans, sometimes at district level, but also occasionally by local communities, reflecting perhaps more specific locations. Many refer to quality of life issues, referring to some of the types of evidence that we have attempted to cover in a fuller manner in this report. However, it is not only the final plan that is important, but also the processes that organisations have to undertake that contributes to the value. The involvement of communities and local stakeholders raises awareness, and contributes to the sense of ownership behind the plans. The process itself helps to build a stronger community. www.ukbap.org.uk

2. Better living surroundings

For the purposes of this report, we have divided the health benefits into two categories:

1. benefits gained from living in a healthy environment, and
2. active gains from physical exercise in the natural environment.

2.1 Government policy and related initiatives

2.1.1 A healthy environment

Many government policies influence biodiversity, and by implication recognise its role in promoting quality of life and a sense of well-being.

Planning policy plays a key role in creating the structural development framework for all communities; promotion of quality of life is shown through the following planning guidance:

- Planning Policy Guidance (PPG) 9: Nature Conservation, which sets out the statutory framework for nature conservation.
- Planning Policy Guidance (PPG)11: Regional Planning. This provides a framework for local authority development plans, and includes a chapter on biodiversity and nature conservation. This advocates close liaison with regional biodiversity and reminds planners of the government commitment to the UK Biodiversity Action Plan. There are examples of potential policies, including re-creation of declining habitats, and improving the biodiversity and landscape quality of the coastline.
- Planning Policy Guidance (PPG) 17: Planning for Open Space, Sport and Recreation, which has a strong emphasis on recreation, but includes a statement requiring the avoidance of significant loss of biodiversity, promotes accessibility, advocates seeking opportunities to improve open space networks, and emphasises links to social inclusion and community cohesion. It gives examples of the role played by country parks and Community Forests

English Nature's Accessible Natural Greenspace standards aims to encourage local planning authorities to ensure that no person need live further than 300m from a quality natural green space.

The UK BAP is delivered through Local Biodiversity Action Plans, which cover rural and urban areas. Examples for Surrey and London are given in *Refs. 5 and 6*. The Local BAPs often recognise the gains to quality of life.

The English Forestry Strategy produced by the **Forestry Commission** [*Ref 7*] is a model of multi-functional benefits offered by forests and woodland. It has four main themes, which represents a change within forestry away from an emphasis on timber production. The themes are:

- Forestry for rural development
- Forestry for economic regeneration
- Forestry for recreation, access and tourism
- Forestry for the environment and conservation

The Commission also states four guiding principles of quality, integration, partnership and public support. Detailed actions for the environment include using the Biodiversity Action Plan to guide nature conservation and promoting the environmental benefits of trees and woodlands.

In rural areas, the Countryside Stewardship Scheme, operated by **Defra**, is producing gains for biodiversity. The Scheme subsidises traditional management of a range of traditional farm habitats, including species rich grassland and heath or moorland, and also offers grants for opening land to either new footpaths or school educational visits. The provision for public access is a recognition of the need for direct public gains from these schemes. The right to free public access over common and open land, contained within the Countryside and Rights of Way Act (2000), is a further example of the value given to access to the countryside and its biodiversity.

Thus there is a picture that shows agencies recognising the indirect benefits of environmental policies for the public, as well as directly for species and habitats. This is covered more fully in the social development section.

2.1.2 Active gains

In order to link in to the wider agenda, it is essential that nature conservation organisations understand the context of how biodiversity fits into health initiatives. The government is committed to joined up thinking and preventative health care, as exemplified in the White Paper *Our healthier nation* [*Ref. 4*]. This seeks to reduce health inequalities across the country, and sets four national targets through to 2010, which cover cancer, coronary heart disease and strokes, accidents, and mental health. As shown below, research has shown that there are significant contributions that can be made by the conservation sector to both coronary heart disease and mental health.

Outside of current government funding, but important nationally, is the programme for Healthy Living Centres, currently funded by the **New Opportunities Fund**, the newest section of Lottery funding. The programme includes a number of activities related to wildlife conservation orientated exercise, the most well known of which are the Walking the Way to Health Initiative and Green Gym (both are covered through case studies later in the chapter). The aim is to make Healthy Living Centres open to 20% of the population.

Health is one sector where devolution of responsibility down from national level is clearly demonstrated. In recent changes to devolve decision making, budgets have been transferred to **Primary Care Trusts** (PCTs). These are small groups of general practitioners, who control 75% of the health budget which is to be spent on the whole range of health services, from preventative education and healthy living, through to acute hospital services. The Green Gym concept is one example of GP involvement in nature conservation activities for health.

Websites	
Our Healthier Nation	www.ohn.gov.uk
Primary Care Trusts	www.doh.gov.uk/pricare/pcts
Healthy Living Centres	www.nof.uk
Health Development Agency	www.hda-online.org.uk
Forestry Commission	www.forestry.gov.uk
New Opportunities Fund	www.nof.uk
Defra	www.defra.gov.uk

2.2 Review/research

2.2.1 A healthy environment

Perhaps the best information on this subject can be found in the forestry sector. Henwood [Ref. 8] has undertaken a wide review of linkages between environment and health for the Forestry Commission and concludes that there are four areas where countryside agencies can contribute:

- ecologically sustainable lifestyles. This relates to well known traditional arguments about mutually inter-dependent ecosystems. This is represented by “Ecosystem services” in Figure 1;
- psychological well-being. We have broadened this to include other health benefits, eg pollution control;
- physical exercise;
- social participation. This is covered in social development below, but emphasises the links between all of these subjects.

Further useful material is provided by The National Urban Forestry Unit’s conference (Wolverhampton 1999) [Ref. 9] and their publication *Trees matter: the benefits of woods and trees in towns*, which summarised a range of benefits [Ref. 10]. Based on thorough literature reviews, these were categorised under the following headings:

- *Stress relief:* Stress is a major contributor to health problems; the Health and Safety Executive estimate that 6.5 million work days are lost to stress each year. Experiments have shown that stress is measurable and relieved within as little as three minutes of exposure to a living green surrounding. It has also been demonstrated that hospitalised patients benefit from a view of natural greenery; which also benefits hospital staff and their stress levels.
- *Trees as therapy:* Active therapy is important generally to the health of the nation, but also in its role to aid recovery. Not only do green leafy surroundings reduce stress, but the active growing and nurturing of plants is widely used in horticultural therapy and for sensory stimulation for a wide ranging number of people from those with physical disabilities to the mentally unwell.
- *Combating pollution control :* Trees have leaf areas between 2 and 12 times the land surface which they cover. These are efficient at removing gaseous air pollutants, such as nitrogen dioxide and ammonia; and dust particles from the atmosphere.
- *Solar radiation:* Trees provide vital shade, protecting us from ultra violet radiation, seen as one of the main triggers for skin cancers. An individual tree can provide Sun Protection Factor (SPF) 6 to 10.
- *Community well being:* The contribution trees make to the environment often strengthens the community's sense of place; trees contribute to people's enjoyment and recreation in a locality. They can bring people together on conservation projects, further fostering community involvement and ownership of a landscape.
- *Noise reduction:* This is a serious form of pollution and major cause of stress. Trees of sufficient density can reduce noise levels by 6 – 8 decibels for every 30 metres of woodland belt. They also can be used to screen sources of noise and therefore assist with a perception that noise is less intrusive.
- *Energy conservation for urban areas:* Trees shelter exposed areas and slow wind speed, resulting in a reduction of air turbulence, thus making towns and cities more pleasant. Less air movement reduces heating and cooling costs, which in turn can reduce fossil fuel consumption. Trees release moisture as they transpire; combine this with the shade they cast and the result is substantial alleviation of summer temperatures around towns.
- *Property values:* North American studies have shown that trees have a monetary value too. House in areas that have mature trees can be 5 – 18% higher in value.

Forestry Commission research has analysed the reasons for visits to their woodlands, and these demonstrate answers that relate both to well-being and active physical recreation. In a survey looking at visitors' reasons for visiting woodland [Ref. 11], the following responses were collated:

Peace and quiet/the environment	38%
Activities	25%
Wildlife	14%
Family outing	6%
Feelings	5%
Other	12%

An earlier English Nature report [*Ref. 12*] also looked in some detail at well-being within the context of urban nature conservation, dividing research and theory into physical effects and psychological effects: emotional, cognitive, behavioural, developmental and social. While linkages are shown, mechanisms remain speculative and no clear guidelines for integrating conservation into planning or policy are offered. Much research does not distinguish between formal (e.g. parks) and informal green space (of greater biodiversity value), and the authors remind conservationists of the need for both. They also conclude that benefits extend to the wider public, as well as those who directly visit the natural sites.

The role of nature or wilderness in promoting well-being has often been stated, but is more difficult to prove, and may be confused with other factors such as the green space of formal parks. The Green Flag Award Scheme, started in 1996, recognises projects that successfully combine the best of both formal parks and nature conservation. A partnership between English Nature and the Institute of Leisure and Amenity Managers, it was formed to look at the quality of public parks and how they reflect the aspirations of Agenda 21 – environmental sustainability and community involvement. The Award raises the profile of public parks and promotes them as safe, well-managed places of distinction and diversity. There are eight criteria for assessment, written from the perspective of the visitor. These cover subjects such as whether the park is welcoming and clearly signed, whether it provides easy access for all abilities, and whether it is considered safe and well maintained. Other criteria cover the dimension of its sustainable management, its value for biodiversity and its range of habitats. Community involvement and the promotion of the park are important elements.

Many studies of the importance of nature for well-being do not distinguish well between biodiversity-rich natural surroundings and more formal green spaces, or indeed cultural influences derived from a sense of place. Some of the medical research reviewed by Henwood [*Ref. 8*] is the best information available to quantify and explain these values, eg Korpela and Hartig [*Ref. 13*], and summarises by suggesting that "the weight of evidence shows that contact with nature is good for you".

The construction industry is also taking an increasing interest in the role of biodiversity in achieving a quality environment for both commercial buildings and housing. Much of this is through a wider philosophy of sustainable living, particularly energy conservation, but it can include biodiversity among the parameters measured. The Building Research Establishment (BRE) has a methodology for audit known as BREAM (Environmental Assessment Method), which audits both ecology and also health and well-being. The South East England Development Agency (www.seeda.co.uk) promotes these ideas to developers through its Building for Nature Project, which includes guidelines for designing in existing habitat, creating new habitats and involving communities. Examples promoted include Great Notley Garden Village, Braintree and Betteshanger Colliery, Kent, where a sustainable drainage system incorporates a reed bed.

The GreenLeaf standard (www.hbf.co.uk/greenleaf.asp?area=standards) is a national scheme run by the New Homes Marketing Board, and awards a kite mark for developments of a suitable quality.

It is perhaps easier to look for evidence in a range of active gains, where controlled measurements are possible.

2.2.2 Active gains

Exercise is seen as a key factor in promoting better health and has been adopted most strikingly by the Walking the Way to Health Initiative, promoted by the Countryside Agency (www.whi.org.uk), with support from the British Heart Foundation (BHF). (Full medical references are available on their web-site). They have categorised health gains into four parts:

1. cardiovascular;
2. weight management;
3. benefits to older people;
4. other.

Beyond this, the researchers noted that the benefits of walking were that:

- It can halve the risk of coronary heart disease.
- Moderate activity such as walking is at least as effective as more vigorous activity in reducing blood pressure.
- It is an ideal, low impact, exercise for overweight people.
- It reduces chance of type II diabetes.
- Mortality was halved in retired men who walk more than two miles a day.
- Walking reduces the risk of osteoporosis. Regular walking in over 45s can reduce hip fractures by up to 50%.
- It can help reduce anxiety and depression.

The Thames Valley Health Walks Scheme [*Refs. 14,15*] has been used to provide controlled monitoring and analysis. Two groups, totalling 260 people, were randomly divided. One received advice only, the other was offered a healthy walks scheme (2-4 mile long led walks). The key gain found was that the health walks had a longer lasting effect than advice only; 36% became and stayed active, compared with 23% of those receiving advice only.

Green Gyms have a more direct relationship to biodiversity, as they are a means of involving people in practical conservation tasks. The first Green Gym was organised as a result of collaboration between BTCV and a local GP in 1997. Following successful trials, it has now expanded to 52 locations. Research is at an early stage, but benefits identified include improved aerobic capacity, improved mental health scores, initial weight loss and increased grip strength (an important issue for older people) [*Refs 16,17,20*]. A further major gain is the ability to retain a long-term commitment from the participants.

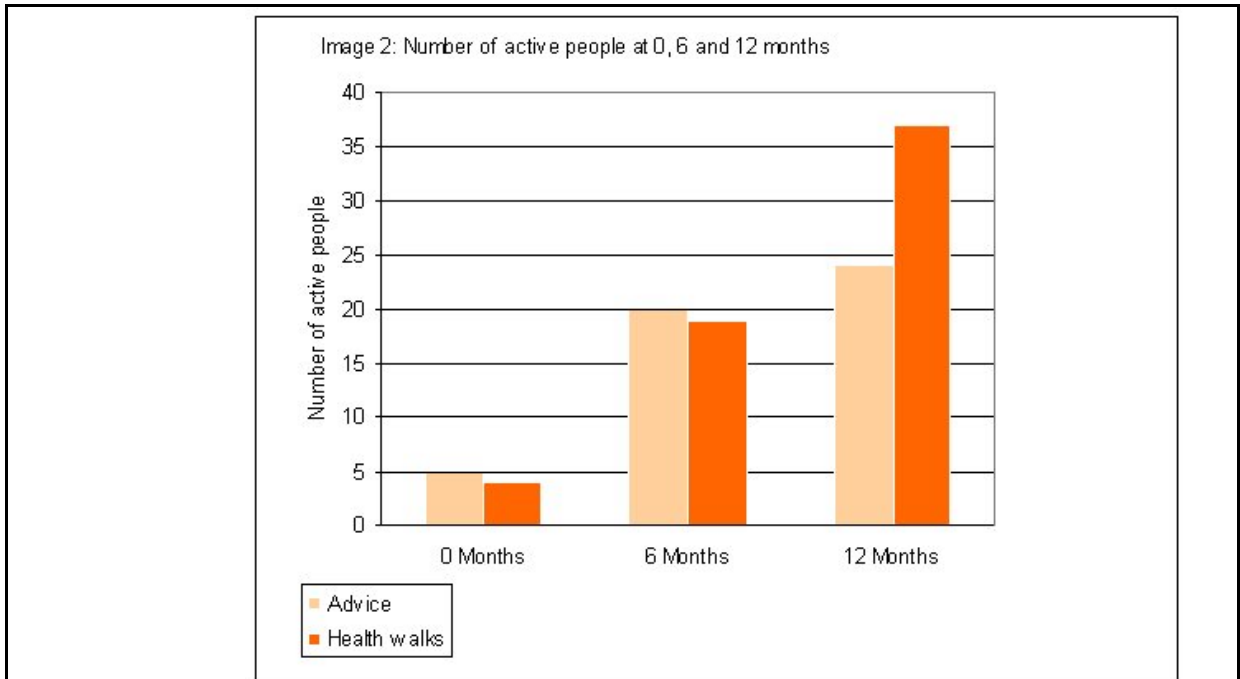


Figure 2 Levels of activity [Ref.15]



Figure 3 Age distribution of health walkers [Ref. 14]

As well as direct health gains, GPs have an interest in the social interactions obtained through exercise programmes, which are particularly strong in group activities such as Green Gym, which would seem to be one of the reasons for better mental health.

Research from the Portslade Green Gym [Ref. 17] showed a number of benefits relating both to mental and physical health:

- Significant improvement in the Mental Health Component Score, as measured by the SF-12 health-related quality of life instrument.

- Decreased depression scores on the Hospital Anxiety and Depression Scale.
- Increased aerobic capacity among some participants.
- Trend towards weight loss and decreased waist to hip ratio.

Wildlife gardening is becoming an increasingly important aspect of promoting biodiversity, particularly in urban areas. The gains from this cut across all the themes listed in the introduction, i.e. appreciation, products, knowledge and ecosystem services. We have included it in this section, as there are significant health gains from gardening as a form of exercise. Like Green Gym, an advantage is that work can progress at a speed to suit an individual, and can use energy ranging from 200 kcal/hour (weeding) through to 500kcal/hour for vigorous digging.

BUGS (Biodiversity in Urban Gardens) is a Sheffield based research programme funded by NERC (Natural Environment Research Council) looking at the overall biodiversity gains from this type of work (www.shef.ac.uk/uk/uni/projects/bugs). Results are due to be published later in the year.

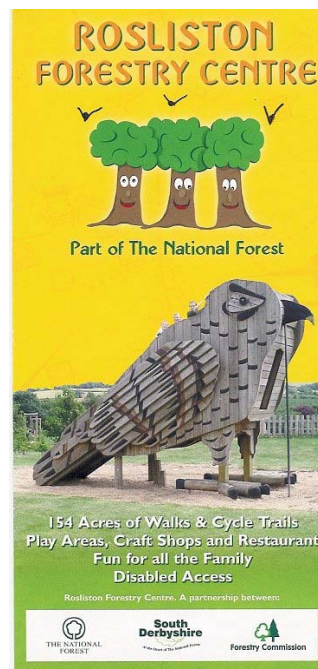
There are overlaps between gardening and horticulture, which has been used for many years as a form of active therapy, and outdoor activity for those with learning disabilities. The charity, Thrive, particularly promotes this work, and it is being researched by the Growing Together project. More about the project can be sourced from their website (www.lboro.ac.uk/departments/ss/growingtogether).

Scottish Natural Heritage has recently launched the “Garden for Life Initiative”, which encourages gardeners to enhance the environment whilst reaping health and quality of life rewards from their hobby. If we consider horticulture or gardening on allotments, there are a range of community and social gains that are also derived, as allotments have a strong local group and community focus. We have included one particular example in the community development section.

2.3 Case studies

WALKING THE WAY TO HEALTH INITIATIVE

Debbie Chesterman, former nurse, runs the Rosliston Forest Centre, Staffordshire in the National Forest. They offer a programme of health walks as part of the CA's "Walking the Way to Health" initiative. As well as regular walks, Debbie also works with targeted groups: two mental health groups; either referred by occupational therapists, or voluntary, cardiac rehabilitation referrals, and socially excluded adults with learning difficulties. Interest from GPs varies, but two or three surgeries are very keen to use this resource. At present the scheme is operating as a pilot, but Debbie wishes to expand and adapt walks to start from the surgeries, as well as continue to provide the services from the Forest Centre, with each single scheme becoming self sustaining. The attraction of the programme is simple: "Walking is good, because anyone can do it, no special equipment is needed; groups can travel out to the centre, or you can start from the back door."



Funding for the programme comes from: New Opportunities Fund (NOF), the National Forest Company, Staffordshire County Council, The Primary Care Trust of South Derby, Derbyshire Dales and Kia Cars. The District Council contributes money in kind. The project is co-ordinated by the Countryside Agency.

COMMUNITY FORESTS

The Community Forest partnerships work together to deliver a comprehensive package of urban, economic and social regeneration, through the creation of new areas of woodland. Their shared vision is intended to create high-quality environments for millions of people by diversifying land use, revitalising derelict land, enhancing biodiversity and providing new opportunities for leisure, recreation, cultural activity, education, healthy living and social and economic development. The pilot for Community Forests began in

1990 and grew to total 12 by 1995, when the National Forest Company was established. Its longevity, and substantial additional funding, has led to major changes, including woodland cover increased from 6% to 13% in the National Forest area, due to 2000 hectares of new planting, and 1273 hectares of new public open access.

Mardyke Valley, in the Thames Chase Community Forest is one example; it has many environmental assets including

ancient woodland and meadows, but also has problems of overgrazing, poor water quality and intrusive development. The Mardyke Partnership successfully bid for Heritage Lottery Funding to audit the Valley's ecology, recreation, community aspirations and education opportunities. This information has fed into a habitat master plan, which will create new

marshes and wet woods with increased public access via new routes and a visitor centre. This 'hidden valley' has been re-discovered by local people, who are becoming increasingly aware of the extraordinary environmental asset on their doorstep.

www.communityforest.org.uk

BTCV GREEN GYM

This is a programme that works closely with a number of GP practices, seeking voluntary recommendations where the GP thinks that a patient will benefit from physical exercise.



Sessions include initial stretching exercises and warming down, and projects have undertaken a variety of tasks including pond clearance, tree planting and

path improvements. The first Green Gym was established at Sonning Common in

Berkshire, and has had some careful analysis of the resulting health gains. More recently a series of programmes have been rolled out around the country, utilising funding from a range of sources including Health Authorities, the Single Regeneration Budget, the National Assembly for Wales and the New Opportunities Fund (Healthy Living Centres). In all cases, groups are being set up with the help of dedicated BTCV staff with the aim of taking each group to self sufficiency [Ref 18]. Another Green Gym is in Swale, where it is one option within a healthy living centre, which may become the most common structure in the future. A further model is that set up in West Sussex, where three local, independent BTCV groups have joined together to offer a Green Gym, which runs with fewer resources. The groups, though run by volunteers, have some Green Gym support and have to meet common standards of volunteer support.

www.btcv.org/greengym

GREEN HEALTH PARTNERSHIP

The Green Health Partnership is a partnership between BTCV, Rethink (formerly National Schizophrenia Fellowship) and Derbyshire County Council. It runs a range of typical BTCV

activities including wildlife landscaping, practical conservation work and environmental arts, but with volunteers referred from Community Mental Health teams.

The referral system, training and support provided means that there is a high resource input, with up to 50 volunteers and six staff at any one time. Such resource levels require a clear demonstration of health benefits as well as conservation gains. These have been externally assessed by questionnaire, with some of the results summarised below to show the average ratings of benefits to participating volunteers (Where 1=strongly disagree, 5=strongly agree). [Ref. 18]

	Sense of purpose	Selfesteem benefits	Relationship	Sense of purpose	Mental health	Wider benefits
Volunteers	4.26	4.0	4.28	4.33	4.22	3.88
Referrers	4.21	4.07	4.14	4.07	3.93	3.86

These results, extracted from an independent audit [Ref. 17], are part of the evidence that led to an overall conclusion that “in the view of participants, the Green Health Partnership fulfils its intention of helping the individual to develop positive relationships and a feeling of self-worth”. GPs also value the service, although score

levels were significantly lower. A comment from one of the volunteers explains the benefit from their point of view, “Freedom, becoming more than a concept, is an actuality here, with the scope to help not only oneself but also others and the earth”.



The project has three years’ funding from NoF. and the European Social Fund, and a small grant from the health service. The project is currently being assessed as part

of a local day services review and is seeking financial support from the health service to ensure its long term future.

FOREST FITNESS

Forest Fitness 2002 (www.forestry.gov.uk/fitness) is a programme promoted by the Forestry Commission, via their web-site and a series of leaflets. The programme seeks to increase the recreational use of the Commission woodlands, and promotes their particular use as a form of healthy exercise. A number of sites are promoted

specifically for improving health through countryside recreation, including:

- Forest fun runs at Grizedale Forest, Cumbria.
- Cycle trails, e.g. Bolderwood, Hampshire.
- Orienteering trails at Aras Park, Isle of Mull.
- Yoga events in the New Forest, Hampshire.

WYRE FOREST VISITOR CENTRE

Managed by Forest Enterprise, this is a 6,000 acre site near Bewdley, and is part SSSI. Visitor surveys reveal that the Wyre Forest receives 300 000 visits a year, 150,000 in the Forest Centre, while the educational Discovery Centre caters for 10,000 children a year. A host of events are run, targeted at different groups, some in conjunction with partners concerned with health and well being. Some, such as the "Forest Heart Project" aim to promote

health by focusing on the value of the local environment, spaces and landscape. Health walks have been devised for different abilities and the leaders stay with the same walk every week. Some events are also arranged for special needs adults and children (both mental and physical). These include residential events as well as day visits. The social aspect is significant, for example, the walks provide a meeting place for older people and single women.

Forestry Commission
HEALTH WALKS
(part of the Wyre Forest District STRIDE and STROLL walking scheme)

Free guided walks with trained leaders
every Tuesday
and every Sunday
in the beautiful Wyre Forest!

Meet at the
Wyre Forest Visitor Centre at 11.00
or join us for coffee at 10.30
All abilities welcome

Join us on....

Quarry walk on the flat (20-30 mins)
Woodland Giant walk up and down (30-40 mins)
(Wear flat shoes with non-slip soles)

For details phone Rosemary Wainall on 01299 266929

walking the way to health
WYRE FOREST DISTRICT COUNCIL
stride stroll
The Countryside Agency
British Heart Foundation

The Wyre Forest team works with many partners: the District Council, Wyre Forest PCT and the FC. The walking project is administered by the CA and the BHF who organise the training. Rosemary Winnal, the Education Officer, works with schools that approach the Discovery Centre individually, Education Authorities outside

of the district and the Family Learning Network, as well as various charitable trusts. Annual events include the Arts Summer School from Dudley and “Woodland Week” run in conjunction with Bewdley Museum.

2.4 Implications for biodiversity

Henwood [Ref. 8] concludes that countryside agencies could contribute to promoting better health in four key areas:

- physical activity
- psychological well being
- social participation
- ecologically sustainable lifestyles

It is clear that the Countryside Agency are pursuing this through the Walking the Way to Health Initiative (www.whi.org.uk), and the Forestry Commission have undertaken a range of research through their Social Forestry Unit [Refs 21,22]. This emphasises the need for co-ordination between the various agencies working with the environment. It is essential that there is a clear avenue for the health service sector to follow when seeking partnerships with the nature conservation field and we do not feel that such an avenue currently exists.

Yet it is essential that such partnerships are fostered and expanded, in order to attract health resources. Also, conservation organisations must be aware of the health services agendas and adapt their existing activities to meet those agendas. It is incumbent on conservation organisations to market their product, both to the health sector and its own customers. The main thrust of this partnership needs to be about preventative medicine or health care, through active, healthy lifestyles. Nationally, this is addressed through the White Paper *Our Healthier Nation*; methods, mechanisms and examples are debated and promoted through the Health Development Agency web-site (www.hda-online.org.uk). Locally, devolution of funds means that conservation organisations need to work in partnership with Local Primary Care Trusts. Adaptations will involve seeking new audiences, providing more support to participants and being prepared to monitor and quantify health outcomes.

The current reliance on lottery funding is a relatively short-term answer and it is essential in the long term that the PCTs are convinced of the value of these projects. Ambassadors such as Drs Malcolm Rigler and William Byrd have an important role, but the conservation sector must look to continue to make and improve its own external links, as well as sharing good practice internally.

Returning to the passive health benefits of biodiversity, these are often tied in to other gains for informal recreation. The value of green lungs and urban fringe projects have long been recognised as having major gains for recreation, as demonstrated, for example, by the major resources made available to the Community Forests programme. These types of project have

relied on a range of arguments to attract resources, including ‘quality of life’. It is appropriate to remind planners of these issues from time to time, not only in response to threats, but also in relation to long term structural planning. In general, we believe that these gains from biodiversity are well recognised, if not clearly articulated or quantified. However, it must be remembered that such gains are also available from more formal green settings, and that urban parks are frequently competing for the same resources e.g. the Heritage Lottery Fund.

Organic foods and healthy eating are now seen as mainstream green issues; it will be a challenge to gain the same attention for biodiversity in both the health service and public thinking.

3. Cultural benefits

3.1 Government policy and related initiatives

The **Department for Culture, Media and Sport** is responsible for government policy on culture. Much of its work relates to traditional aspects of culture such as historic buildings and the performing arts. We have not found any recognition of biodiversity in the department’s policies, and this is an area which English Nature may care to address.

Similarly, the **Arts Council** does not refer to biodiversity in its strategic statements, although there is a wide range of examples of arts being used to promote nature and biodiversity. These tend to operate at a local level, particularly through community arts projects and are frequently part-funded by regional arts councils, who are distributors of large amounts of grant aid at a local level.

At a local level, culture more frequently includes environmental issues. Many county councils are now producing cultural strategies, and some of these e.g. Shropshire and Nottinghamshire, include clear recognition of the countryside in general and also nature conservation.

Nationally, the **Heritage Lottery Fund** (www.hlf.org.uk) has become a major funding agency for biodiversity and natural heritage. Grants are available for:

- Countryside Parks and Gardens,
- Education and Access,
- Records,
- Local or National Heritage.

Interestingly, the Fund is also very aware of the social side of heritage and conservation projects, and has produced guidelines to encourage strong community links [Ref. 23]. Other sectors also recognise the role of communities and social development, and this again demonstrates the importance of linking across to related organisations, and demonstrating the social gains from projects conceived initially for heritage or biodiversity.

The relationship between culture, conservation and community is also recognised and promoted through the Local Heritage Initiative, run by the Countryside Agency with HLF funding and sponsorship from the Nationwide Building Society. As well as funding natural

heritage projects, it also grant aids projects which promote customs and traditions associated with local communities.

3.2 Review/research

In a detailed analysis of English culture, Ackroyd [Ref. 24] identified the "territorial imperative" as the most important theme; that is, how a local area can influence or guide all those who inhabit it. All writers, artists, composers and philosophers have been haunted by this sense of place in which past use and past tradition sanctify a certain spot of ground. In England, the reverence for the past and the affinity with the natural landscape join together in a mutual embrace. From the tree worship of British druids through to our national obsession for small-scale gardening, Ackroyd describes the English imagination as "forever green". The association of writers (Bronte, Hardy, Wordsworth), artists (Constable, Spencer, Wilson) and composers (Elgar, Britton) is well known, and extends through to local distinctiveness projects of all shapes and sizes, in urban as well as rural areas. It is the human involvement with traditional land management and production which most people readily associate with, rather than the wildlife *per se*.

Moving from the inspirational to the scientific rationale, Korpela and Hartig [Ref. 13] are the most often quoted source of research on this topic. They looked at the restorative quality of favourite places. Their work was a controlled study, and suggested that 'favourite places' afford people opportunities for regulating emotions and feelings about themselves and their life goals – two goals that are used as outcomes in psychotherapy and clinical psychology.

Common Ground (www.commonground.org.uk), founded in 1983, are the particular proponents of the cultural values of nature, and its role in creating a sense of place [Refs. 25,26,27]. They have been hugely instrumental and inspirational in helping "people learn about, enjoy and take more responsibility for their own environment." (Common Ground, 2000).

"Community involvement presupposes community. We need to create the circumstances for people to come together and make relationships, build responsibilities, take care of each other and their place. Much of what Common Ground does is to create the conditions for congregation and celebration, confidence once built begins to spill over into activity." Sue Clifford, EN / BANC conference 2002.

Projects include the campaign for Local Distinctiveness, Save Our Orchards, Apple Day, Community Orchards, Parish Maps, Local Flora Britannica, Rhynes, Rivers and Running Brooks and Confluence. Currently, Common Ground is working towards producing an encyclopaedia of local distinctiveness to champion the variation across England to be called "England in Particular" (www.england-in-particular.info). The Millennium Map project, first popularised and described by Common Ground, is interesting in that it shows the full range of features, stories, history and cultural influences important to the groups, and thus gives a relative value to biodiversity.

A similar value for biodiversity is shown in the Draft Cultural Strategy developed by Shropshire County Council. As part of its preparation, local residents were invited to send in postcards listing what they felt made Shropshire special. The Strategy (www.shropshire-cc.gov.uk/culturals.nsf) lists four key themes:

- Community wellbeing
- Lifelong learning
- Improving the environment
- Developing the economy

Within this, the detail described in relation to the third theme “Improving the Environment” makes it clear that a ‘sense of place’ is a key issue.

“To protect and enhance the environment of Shropshire’s villages, towns and rural areas. How do we promote the ‘power of place’?”

- There is overwhelming support from you for a number of ‘green’ issues – protecting the environment, transport issues, encouraging energy efficiency, conserving our heritage.
- You told us you value Shropshire’s countryside and its diversity, you want to develop our market towns and protect village services.
- People value places, not just a series of individual sites and buildings. People care about the whole of their environment.”

From: *Draft Cultural Strategy*, Shropshire County Council.

The key thing about this process is that the agenda has been decided by input from the community, rather than planners or officials. It also puts the role of biodiversity into context with other cultural issues – an important element of one of four key themes.

Nottinghamshire’s Cultural Strategy (www.nottscc.gov/cultural_strategy.htm) has “supporting environmental sustainability” as one of five objectives, and includes strong cultural links through its Countryside Unit – Sherwood Forest, home of folklore hero Robin Hood, is a major country park. Delivery partners of the Cultural Strategy include the Countryside Agency and English Heritage. The Forestry Commission and British Waterways are associated partners. Excerpts from the plan relating to conservation are given below.

“Objective 4. To support environmental sustainability by maximising the use of existing cultural resources and facilities and ensuring developments enhance the conservation and understanding of the County’s environment.

- Target 4. To develop the potential for countryside recreation through co-ordination of the authorities and agencies involved in conserving the Nottinghamshire countryside.
- Target 5. To develop existing programmes of environmental education.
- Target 6. To regenerate urban and country parks as cultural centres. (Partners listed include English Nature)
- Target 7. To maximise the recreational and cultural use of water and waterways in the County.”

From: *Nottinghamshire Cultural Strategy Action Plan*.

The Forestry Commission is undertaking detailed research into the social role of forests. This has included work in South Wales that has measured the role of the local forest in defining the sense of place [Ref. 22]. This work has fostered the concept of the idea of forest schools.

Forest Schools are a unique way of building independence and self esteem in young children. They originated in Sweden in the 1950s, gradually spreading to other countries. Forest Schools use the outdoors as part of children's learning of practical and social skills with an independent approach to safety issues. It has been found that the combination of freedom and responsibility has been particularly beneficial to children with little confidence or challenging behaviour. Two colleges, Evesham College and Bridgwater College, now offer BTEC training for teachers and play leaders and their assistants. Bridgwater College is working with the Forestry Commission to spread the concept in Wales. These programmes show strong inter-relationships with community development (www.bridgwater.ac.uk/forestschool).

The theme of a sense of place can also be particularly important for immigrant communities. The Black Environment Network have published and promoted much work in this area [Refs. 28,29] (www.ben-network.org.uk). BEN stress the importance of relating to the cultures of a community, and responding to the community's agenda. When undertaking a range of conservation projects, links have frequently been made back to plants and habitats from their previous culture. Indeed it becomes vital to drop notions of the value of native species, and concentrate on the gains for biodiversity. These projects are fulfilling a valuable role in helping residents' value and celebrate both past and present.

Mentioned earlier in this chapter, the Local Heritage Initiative (www.lhi.org.uk) offers grants of £3 000 - £20 000, aiming at local groups, helping people to care for local heritage. Two examples of LHI projects with biodiversity gains are the Saving the Black Poplar, Darlington, and Orton Community Farm, Cumbria, which includes the restoration of former species-rich limestone grassland. The web-site includes a wide range of other examples, and serves a role to both publicise projects and act as an information network.

3.3 Case studies

COMMON GROUND ORCHARDS PROJECT

“An orchard demonstrates the cultural complexities. The loss of an orchard is not a simple loss to the local economy or indeed to the landscape. An old orchard is a formal wood, it sustains a complex web of wildlife and holds together a cats cradle of cultural richness. It may have varieties of fruit particular to the locality, each with its own stories and uses. Particular buildings for storage and manufacture will have been developed. Recipes and cooking methods and perhaps cider or cherry brandy typical of nowhere else. Customs, wassailing, songs and festive gatherings reinforce community. Hard but social work shares the wisdom gathered over generations of pruning, grafting, dabbling and discerning about slope, soil and season, storage and use – just as with the olive groves, cork oak fields and vineyards of mainland Europe.

If we call an orchard wood pasture, the nature conservationists suddenly sees it in a different light. 300 year pear trees, ancient flower rich grassland, lichens and mosses, fungi, noble chafer amongst apple trees, dormice in cobnut plats. Associated with this we often find perhaps generations of accumulated wisdom and experience”. [Ref. 26]

Many local groups have picked up on this theme, as it appeals to wider interests than pure nature conservation. Schemes have involved working to establish new orchards with traditional varieties e.g. Chinbrook Community Orchard, Lewisham, and also the rescue of old sites e.g. Green Farm Community Orchard, Gloucester.

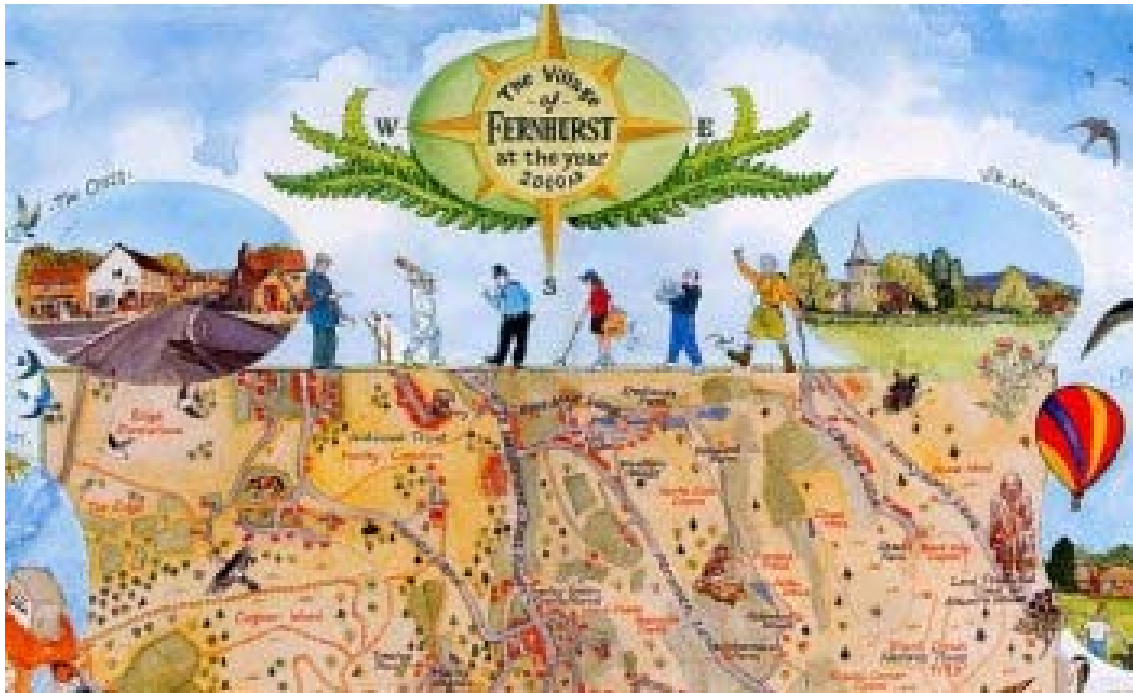


(James Ravillious for Common Ground)

PARISH MAPS

The Women's Institute undertook a nationwide project to mark the Millennium, with individual Institutes producing maps of their Parish. These maps were a guide to the local history, culture and sense of place, so provide a good example of how nature is valued in

the community. Some areas achieved particularly good coverage e.g. West Sussex, an example from the area is shown below and can be found in its entirety on the Internet. (www.England-in-particular.info/wsussex.html).



BALAJI TEMPLE

The Balaji (Hindu) Temple in Birmingham (www.venkateswara.org.uk) is built on a landfill site of 12 acres. This site has a temple at the centre, and extensive areas of landscape restoration in progress with areas that have been reforested and wildflower meadows planned. The result is the integration of natural, cultural and social elements. It is a good example of an ethnic population feeling an ownership of and interaction with the landscape. It builds on ownership and increases understanding and therefore appreciation

of their immediate surroundings. The site has exotic plants, including symbolic trees, near to the temple and then native and less cultivated plants further from the centre. The group is associated with BEN, but also has links with British Waterways, BTCV and Sandwell Health Authority. Major funding has come from the Millennium Commission. This project has received some mixed publicity, but it demonstrates much good practice, with links to the community, culture and biodiversity.

THE COMMON PLAYERS

The Common Players (www.common-players.org.uk) are an example of an Arts Council subsidised community theatre group. Formed in 1989 the Common Players set out to create accessible theatre and tour around rural village greens during the summer months, in the Strolling Player style.

Their philosophy is to create exciting, relevant and original theatre both for and with people who, usually because of where they live have little chance to experience the excitement of live performance. Their plays have a strong environmental theme, for example 'The Podfather' concerning the threat of genetically modified (GMO) crops.



PLANTLIFE

To commemorate the Queen's Golden Jubilee, the conservation charity Plantlife is running the County Flowers Project, a scheme to choose a wildflower for each county in the country, with voting via post or their website. The aim is to choose a flower that is identified with the character

and sense of place; this may be through its local abundance, or be a particularly important local symbol. Results will be announced in 2003.

(www.plantlife.org.uk)



BISHOPS WOOD FOREST SCHOOL

Bishops Wood Centre (the site for a Forest School) have recently come to the end of an extremely successful pilot year where 320 foundation stage children have experienced the Forest School. The feedback from staff, parents and children

has been very positive. The centre are continuing to offer Forest School sessions, as well as offering 'taster days' to all ages. Other sites are being developed around the country. (www.bishopswoodcentre.org.uk)



3.4 Implications for biodiversity

There is a wealth of good examples demonstrating connections between biodiversity, cultural heritage, historic meaning and communities, though still relatively few would recognise the term biodiversity. Projects that capture the imagination of a broad spectrum of people, such as the Millennium Maps, can acquire a life of their own, and only need relatively small initial funding to involve and stimulate a wide cross section of the community.

Similarly, projects linking art and the environment are perhaps more powerful when they are community based, working with groups and individuals. Professional artists can then be used as facilitators, rather than as performers.

However intangible it may appear, community is the fabric by which society is held together. As we have seen, there are very real links between community and biodiversity; we feel that the importance of community in contributing to and celebrating biodiversity cannot be stressed enough.

Other sectors are also looking at cross-linkages which relate to nature conservation and biodiversity to justify resources, including the arts, health [Ref. 31] and culture. This is particularly so in the arts sector [Ref.30], which is also very dependent on a wide range of funding and charitable support. Whilst this situation provides opportunities for projects to cross sectoral boundaries, it also indicates competition between different sectors for the same sources of funds. A developing source of networking information is the Creative Communities register (www.creativecommunities.org.uk), which promotes cross sector links

among the fields of arts and culture, health, business, environment, regeneration and community development.

4. Social development

4.1 Government policy and related initiatives

Many departments have an agenda that cuts across communities. The **Department for Food, the Environment and Rural Affairs** is the government department which leads on biodiversity, with English Nature as its lead agency. Other agencies within Defra that have roles in biodiversity include the Countryside Agency, The Environment Agency and British Waterways. Forestry Commission's English, Welsh and Scottish Forestry Strategies all include objectives relating to social development. These agencies all involve themselves with local communities, not only to preach the message, but also because the gains in community spirit and social development are increasingly recognised.

The **Office of the Deputy Prime Minister** has imposed a duty on local authorities to prepare community strategies, which address the economic, social and environmental well-being of an area. Guidance says the plans should take account of national and global concerns such as the mitigation of climate change and the protection of biodiversity. Some strategies e.g. Cardiff, have specifically used the strategy to include the process of preparing a local Biodiversity Action Plan.

The Neighbourhood Renewal Unit, within the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, includes support for New Deal for Communities, the Neighbourhood Renewal Fund, and the Community Empowerment Fund. The Unit's remit is urban regeneration and in all of the above programmes environmental factors are recognised as important. However, biodiversity or conservation are only a small part of that environmental agenda. The challenge is to improve links, champion some of the existing evidence, and thus increase the relative values attached to the natural environment at policy level. A recent report [Ref. 32], *Living Spaces*, includes a commitment to an enquiry into links between social and environmental exclusion as a basis for further action.

The Active Community Unit of **The Home Office** promotes active citizenship. An example of a project they fund is encouraging the development of employee volunteering, run by the National Trust for a consortium of conservation organisations. (More information is available on the website: (www.nationaltrust/employeevolunteering.org.uk)).

The Community Cohesion Unit (also within the Home Office) is relatively new, and aims to cut across government departments. It seeks to build a common vision and sense of belonging, and strong positive relationships between people of different backgrounds. The Home Office's Crime Reduction Strategy covers a range of measures, and concludes the strategy will be greatly enhanced "if communities come together to take control of their neighbourhoods for the benefit of all". Examples of non-anecdotal environmental / conservation projects are limited, but include Youthworks (more details are given later in this chapter).

The Department for Education and Skills oversees a number of relevant programmes including:

- Millennium Volunteers is a scheme to encourage volunteering in 18 – 24 year olds. It has been very widely taken up by the nature conservation sector.
- Community Champions Programme (environmental projects is one of nine themes)

All post 16 education in England is now funded through the Learning and Skills Council, and some of our ‘skills for work’ examples have utilised this funding to bring extra resources into the conservation sector.

The Department for Employment and Learning New Deal training scheme for unemployed 18-24 year olds includes an Environmental Task Force option.

Although regional government does not set policy, it is increasingly at the forefront of delivery of government policy, particularly in the field of urban and neighbourhood regeneration. The nine English regions have an increasing range of responsibilities devolved to them, which are run through Government Offices, and a series of parallel regeneration agencies, e.g. Advantage West Midlands (AWM) and SWeRDA (South West Regional Development Agency). There is emphasis on regeneration, including at a community level, and through sustainable communities. SWeRDA have formed a concordat with the Countryside Agency, which extols the virtues of the environment, and they use the environment as a strong selling point to attract industry to the region. A biodiversity steering group, including English Nature, has developed policies to underpin this commitment.

The **New Opportunities Fund** includes The Green Spaces and Sustainable Communities Fund, which is widely utilised for biodiversity, including People’s Places (see below) and Wildspace! Wildspace is the current English Nature grants programme for local nature reserves. Transforming Your Space is aimed at making communities safer, healthier, greener, cleaner and more welcoming and accessible to all.

The challenge for nature conservation organisations is to keep abreast of the rapidly developing political agenda, and be aware of the opportunities available. However, it is encouraging to note that the bottom up approach, based on community involvement and empowerment, which is at the core of initiatives such as Local Agenda 21, is now recognised as a powerful tool for change. Environmental considerations are high on that agenda, but very often it is the physical environment, for example bad housing and vandalism, that dominates.

4.2 Review/research

It is important to set the role of wildlife and natural areas in the wider context, to avoid overstating or misusing data. Communities and residents will nearly always have a wider agenda, of which the natural environment is only part; this will be particularly so in more urban areas. Nevertheless biodiversity will often be a contributing factor, though many will value it without being aware of the term.

Social exclusion is normally perceived to be a problem in inner cities and much of the research and quantifiable information is from that sector. However, exclusion is also an issue in rural communities, which is caused by a combination of low incomes, relatively high housing costs and lack of transport [Ref. 33]. The situation is also complicated by the fact that the socially excluded tend to live dispersed amongst the more affluent members of

society. In the proceedings of the 2001 conference held by the Countryside Recreation Network, *Removing barriers, creating opportunities: social exclusion in the countryside* [Ref. 34], the following points were made about countryside projects. Twelve projects were included in the study, with target beneficiaries ranging from ethnic groups, disabled, the young, to the homeless urban poor. Factors identified as contributing to success included:

- Successful projects tend to be *community driven* rather than having a top down approach; champions come from within the community.
- Projects succeed where the target groups are *empowered* and self esteem is raised.
- By increasing social cohesion barriers to participation in a project are diminished.
- Projects based on partnership have greater success.
- Key staff with motivation and energy contributes to success.
- Evaluation, both quantitative and qualitative is seen as important; a recognition of the need to assess performance.
- Effective marketing (of projects) was seen as important.

The Groundwork Trust runs as nearly 50 independent, but federated Trusts, with the first one being set up in 1981. Initially working as a three way partnership between central and local government and industry, Groundwork Trusts have concentrated on community-based, neighbourhood regeneration work [Ref. 35]. As well as working with communities, their great strength is understanding and expertise of accessing funding from a wide range of sources, which now include regional government schemes, large Lottery projects and European funding. By the nature of Groundwork projects, many tend to be in an urban setting. One particular project is called SiteSavers, which is funded by Barclays Bank, and promotes environmental improvements in economically deprived areas through offering grants and awards to community groups to transform areas of derelict or redundant land.

“*Prove It!*” is a published study undertaken by the New Economics Foundation, on behalf of Groundwork UK [Ref. 36], which indicates methods of measuring impacts, developed to help quantify the community benefits of the SiteSavers scheme. It is worth reproducing some of the content of this study here, to demonstrate the innovative ways suggested to measure the community benefits.

Indicator	Additional details
I feel I could help change attitudes and help improve things around here	This looks at people’s perceptions of how they can influence local affairs
	This is a good place to live
	I am proud of this area
I have learned new skills on [the project] in the last 6 months	This looks at the way in which human capital develops
Percentage of respondents saying: Within the last 6 months I have enjoyed several conversations with a new person from a different Age or Background	This was true for nearly 60 per cent of participants in Barclays SiteSavers
Percentage of respondents saying: I feel safe out and about at day/night In my community Using the [SiteSavers] facility	As we saw earlier, trust has a real impact on people’s perceived and actual safety
Percentage of respondents saying: Neighbours around here look out for each other	
Percentage of respondents saying: I think that the	Indicates trust in capability of community to run

Indicator	Additional details
project/facility will survive	things long term, and of the community not to vandalise it
How many new friends have you made through the project?	In the case of 16 Barclays SiteSavers projects, the average participant makes seven (and a half) new friends
Percentage of respondents saying: I know who to contact to help me change things locally in: Local community groups At the council In other agencies like Groundwork Among people in the neighbourhood	
Percentage of respondents saying: I have benefited from being involved with Groundwork	
How many people (previously unknown to Groundwork/the lead agency) have been involved in the project over the last six months?	Indicates agencies ability to work with local people. NON SURVEY
Number of agencies working with Groundwork (or working together) on the project (voluntary or other agencies eg council)	NON SURVEY

The two year evaluation of SiteSavers covered 17 sites, from a skateboard park to a nature trail, and two surveys of around 2000 people were included. [Refs. 37,38]. Key findings of the evaluation were:

- **diverse connections:** 80% of project participants had enjoyed a conversation with a new person of a different background in the last six months;
- **new friendships:** Those involved as project participants gained an average of five new friends each by the end of the project;
- **community know how:** Those in the wider community who definitely knew who to contact in the neighbourhood to effect change grew threefold to 35%;
- **knock on effect 1 – Community safety:** Of the wider community, 86% now felt safe out and about in the local area in the day compared to 55% before the project had been carried out;
- **knock on effect 2 – Things don't go back to normal:** Those involved in Barclays SiteSavers go on to be active in different ways locally, e.g. two participants became Parish Councillors.

Key lessons and recommendations were that:

- **Renewal schemes should borrow from the Barclays SiteSavers template:** Barclays SiteSavers projects build the physical and social infrastructure of communities simultaneously. This approach fits into modern thinking on renewal that is about participation, partnership and lasting impacts.
- **Evaluation of renewal to emphasise connections and trust:** The development of trust and connections is central to effective neighbourhood renewal and the promotion of 'liveability'. All renewal initiatives need to be evaluated in these terms.
- **Incentives in renewal schemes for 'lay' evaluation:** The *Prove It!* pilot shows that community members have an important role to play in evaluation. Evaluation can build on and develop local skills and so contribute to renewal rather than simply

observe it. A proportion of renewal funds should be set aside to allow local people to explore the impacts of renewal in their areas.

Barclays are now also working in partnership with BTCV, sponsoring “Environments for All”, which particularly seeks to broaden the base of environmental work, into under-represented, disadvantaged communities. For example a youth centre in Brixton (largely Afro-Caribbean youths) and asylum seekers in Glasgow. [Ref. 39].

Other “green” schemes also show an increasing awareness of the importance of social values for a truly sustainable project. The Forestry Stewardship Council scheme for certifying the sustainable origin of timber includes social values in its assessment criteria. Of ten principles, the fourth is “*forest management operations shall maintain or enhance the long term social and economic wellbeing of forest workers and local communities*”. (www.fsc-uk.info/principles.asp)

Local Agenda 21 projects also show some strong linkages between the social issues and biodiversity. Covering sustainable development, Local Agenda 21 deals with much broader issues than biodiversity, but usefully shows some of the ways of quantifying a broad spectrum of community gains from the wide environmental agenda. For example:

- Bristol LA21 uses average GP consultation rate as an indicator of community health.
- East Hampshire measures decrease in mental health referrals.
- Hertfordshire records the percentage of people affected by crime against a) ourselves, and b) against our property.
- Merton has an assessment of public confidence in using parks and open spaces.

(Examples from *Prove It*).

As can be seen there are again linkages throughout between the environment, communities, health and culture.

A Community Development Foundation report [Ref. 40] demonstrates the importance of social issues to environmental work, suggesting a number of points for consideration by environmental organisations:

- That “all organisations working in this field need to take a wide and inclusive approach to environmental work”; there is no single prescription for improving an environment.
- Environmental organisations need to recognise the importance of community development work to ensure that staff working in deprived areas are suitably trained.
- That not everyone’s definition of “the environment” will be the same, the same ‘jargon’ is not used; communities have other priorities.

This is very similar to more detailed messages coming from the Joseph Rowntree Foundation [Ref. 41], who have been following a programme of research *Reconciling environmental and social concerns*, which concluded with the key messages shown below.

“For environmental policy makers:

- Environmental policies with a strong local focus are more likely to attract public interest and support than those that rely on a global consciousness.
- Integration between environmental and social policy is essential. The social equity implications of national and local environment policy initiatives should always be evaluated.
- Many small problems are symptoms of deeper and more complex social and economic issues. Sustainable solutions to local environmental problems require these wider issues to be addressed.
- Individual environmental action may best be encouraged by emphasising the practical and financial benefits.
- It is unrealistic to expect everyone to be ‘doing their bit’ for the environment unless it is made cheap and easy for members of the disadvantaged groups to do so.

For local authorities:

- Tackling everyday problems such as dirty streets could provide a way for local authorities to demonstrate their responsiveness to local concerns.
- The presence of caretakers or wardens with the power to encourage and enforce better behaviour was widely welcomed.
- Lack of effective consultation about proposed changes reinforces local people’s sense of powerlessness and lends weight to the perception that local authorities are out of touch.

For those working in environmental regeneration:

- Interest in and engagement with environmental projects may better be encouraged by talk of local improvements than by reference to the environment.
- Proactive measures to improve the negative image of areas should be undertaken as part of regeneration initiatives.
- Regeneration projects able to involve young people would be especially welcome.

For environmental organisations:

- Environmental organisations should consider ways of raising their profile amongst disadvantaged groups and engage with their everyday concerns.
- Environmental information must be available at a local level.
- Care should be taken to ensure that the language of environmental justice does not reinforce the negative image of particular places or ignore the problems faced by rural residents.”

Crime prevention is frequently perceived as a gain from active community involvement schemes, through the creation of better local surroundings, which often gain from being more

utilised as a result. Individuals frequently testify as to how active participation has changed their lives. Very recently, some objective research has been undertaken through Youth Works, a scheme by Groundwork, Marks & Spencer and Crime Concern (www.youth-works.com). This covers a range of environmental projects, but the full report is not yet published. In Burnley, vehicle related crime fell by nearly 25%, and violent crime by 6%, achieved at a time of racial tensions in the summer 2001 [Ref. 40]. While this evaluation is important, there would appear to be a relative lack of quantitative data relating to environmental projects.

4.2.1 Skills for work and conservation volunteers

Many people play an active role in nature conservation, through practical land management activities. While this is essentially a form of recreation, these activities also provide a range of skills useful in the wider context of work, for both the individual and society. The examples below relate to the voluntary sector only as the use of the environment in government job creation or training schemes is a huge topic in itself.

The traditional conservation volunteer movement used to consist of groups working on nature reserves, but has continued to evolve over the years, developing a much closer community focus. Nevertheless there are some traditional activities continuing, as indicated in the table below, which gives some examples of current conservation volunteer programmes.

Organisation	Programme	Size of programme	Website
BTCV	Natural Breaks	386 projects in 2002	www.btcv.org.uk
National Trust	Working holidays	430 projects in 2003	www.nationaltrust.org.uk
Inland Waterways Association	Waterway Recovery Group	20 national projects, 500 volunteers	www.wrg.org.uk
Princes Trust	12 week course	2500 volunteers pa	www.princes-trust.org.uk

Many of these programmes serve a range of roles beyond conserving biodiversity, perhaps the most important of which is personal development of the individuals attending. This may be in learning of job skills or of a purely social nature. There may be wider community gains, where local interest is stimulated by a visiting residential project, but the community gains are much greater where groups are working at a local level within their own community.

4.2.2 Citizen Science (Ecological Surveys)

The examples below take their strength from committed members and volunteers. Government has increasingly recognised the role of voluntary organisations and active citizenship, and the Home Office has an Active Community Unit. The term ‘citizen science’ has been coined to describe active involvement from individuals or a community to survey and research; our interest, in this case, is ecological survey.

Where examples involve children and schools, there is always a case to link into the national curriculum, which government policy controls quite tightly. Linking projects to Key Stages of the National Curriculum make projects much more attractive to teachers and other educators.

The membership size of wildlife organisations is frequently quoted to support the value society attaches to wildlife, but such statistics include overlapping memberships, and often represent members whose commitment may be no more than an annual direct debit. A more interesting set of figures comes when active involvement is counted, and there is an increasing range of survey work that relies on volunteer input, in some cases from very young people. Some of these projects are given in the table below.

Survey	Organisation	Participants	Web-site
Common Birds Census	British Trust for Ornithology (BTO)	250	www.bto.org.uk
Garden Bird Watch	BTO	15 000	www.bto.org.uk
Annual garden birds survey	RSPB	262 000	www.rspb.org.uk
Oak budburst survey	Forestry Commission	Over 300 sites	www.forestry.gov.uk
Making it Count for People and Plants	Plantlife	Nearly 400	www.plantlife.org.uk
Cranesbill survey (part of Common Flower survey)	Plantlife	500 records, 194 recorders	www.plantlife.org.uk
National River survey	WATCH	750,000	www.qsit.net/watch
Water vole survey	WATCH	4000	www.qsit.net/watch
Garden butterfly survey	Butterfly Conservation	Over 30 000	www.butterfly-conservation.org.uk
Nature's Calendar, Phenology network	Woodland Trust	18 642	www.phenology.org.uk
Hedgerow survey for LBAP	Cheshire Landscape Trust	130 surveyors 136 parishes	N/A

These projects produce important environmental and biodiversity data that would be extremely costly to obtain by other means. Individual recorders, including young children, gain from the knowledge that they are contributing as well as learning. Some of the schemes, especially more local ones, also contribute to feelings of a sense of place and identity.

Government is seeking to develop partnerships, and often grant-aids core costs. Such is the spread of partnerships with the voluntary sector, that there is a debate about how deeply involved voluntary organisations should become. This is particularly so in health and social services, where the debate now centres on whether voluntary organisations are being used to provide statutory services 'on the cheap', rather than about recognising their value. In conservation, the role of voluntary organisations has always been substantial and similar tensions can arise.

4.3 Case studies

TAPROUTES

TAPROUTES is a consortium of voluntary organisations in Cornwall, recently joined by English Nature. They have accessed funding through the European Social Fund, Objective 1, and previously an ESF 5(b) programme, to enable free courses for individuals, some of whom are seeking to develop practical skills to further a career in nature conservation. Courses are short and flexible, and have achieved a job outcome rate of 55% for participants, with a further

7% moving on to further education or training.

There have been 225 beneficiaries, with 124 job outcomes (55%) and 16 further education outcomes. 332 courses have been run, with 29 NVQs in Environmental Conservation achieved. One participant commented, *“The scheme has given me the opportunity to learn a host of new skills in a fantastic environment, and contacts made through this work have led on to my current job.”*

BTCV INSTITUTE FOR ENVIRONMENTAL CONSERVATION

BIEC (www.btcv.org.uk) is a new joint venture partnership between BTCV and Broxtowe College. It is a scheme to facilitate a wide range of training courses, run by BTCV for volunteers and trainees, to receive external accreditation. It is similar to TAPROUTES, but is being developed on a national scale. Units

achieved can be built up towards recognised NVQ qualifications. Course syllabuses have been assessed and given unit values, which are recognised by the Learning and Skills Council (LSC). This brings in funding resources to the BTCV as well as improving the recognition of training by future employers.

MILLENNIUM VOLUNTEERS

Millennium Volunteers (www.millenniumvolunteers.gov.uk) covers a wider range of volunteering, with environmental projects being one of six categories. Over 50,000 volunteers have been involved and the scheme has managed to attract a diverse cross section of volunteers; half had not volunteered before and there was also a good ethnic mix. The scheme is for 16-24 year olds, and requires a personal commitment to undertaking work with clear community benefits. Because of government funding there are resources to cover a range of individual expenses and offer high quality training. Organisations running schemes

include conservation charities, volunteer bureau and a wide range of existing youth organisations e.g. student unions and Raleigh International.

One Millennium Volunteer, Adam, received his Award of Excellence for working at Daventry Country Park, where he has been involved in a wide range of activities including carpentry, chain-saw use and environmental education work with children. Adam says that he has improved his skills in areas of work that he wants to go into and also hopes that his work with young people in conservation and environment has benefited the

community by raising awareness about the environment and projects such as the local compost scheme.

“It’s fun, inspiring and it might even change your life,” The Big Issue.

THE PRINCE’S TRUST

The Prince’s Trust (www.princes-trust.org.uk) run a twelve week programme of team building, developing skills and community projects and a twenty day programme for community employees. 160 partner organisations include several Groundwork Trusts and Conservation Volunteers Northern Ireland

(CVNI). While not specifically environmental, the Trust has a particular record of working with young offenders, seeking to reduce reconviction rates, by using the programme to move volunteers on from unemployment into training or jobs.

BARCLAYS’ SITE SAVERS

St Lawrence Parish Centre Community Garden, developed in partnership with Groundwork Wirral, has been created on an area of neglected waste land. This is a more formal site than some other examples, with lighting, seating and murals, but it has followed the community agenda, and is used as a wildlife and arts resource by the local school.

Access for All at Skylarks Nature Reserve is a Nottinghamshire Wildlife Trust scheme, involving local volunteers and six staff from the local Barclays Bank branch. As well as access work, coppicing and hay making for meadows was undertaken. Links with the Winged Fellowship Skylarks Centre, a local respite centre providing care for the disabled, have been strengthened, ensuring wide use of the new facility.

PEOPLE’S PLACES

Peoples Places is a NOF funded scheme run by BTCV, with additional funding from Rio Tinto Zinc and English Nature. Grants of up to £10,000 are awarded to community groups, for environmental improvement works. Schemes are targeted at statistically deprived areas, and measure a range of social factors in the judging process, including Local Deprivation Index (ODPM), level of involvement of wider community, and ethnic mix.

Sholver Millenium Green Trust, Oldham. This group, which is a registered

charity, was set up to develop a Millennium Green, created through funding from a Countryside Agency scheme. Local Agenda 21 staff have worked with the Trust, a local tenants organisation, school groups and local NVQ trainees. A wetland area and pond-dipping platform have been created, with adjacent ground being turned into a wildflower meadow. School groups have helped with management work and now have an extra education resource.



Gin Pit Homewatch And Residents' Association, a former coal mining village, near Wigan, has undertaken a wide range of tree and hedge planting and access improvements work. The project started out as a small scheme to adopt a neglected patch of young woodland, planted on an old tip, but has led to the formation of a new residents' association. As well as delivering nature conservation outcomes, the scheme has extended to regular events and the renovation of a playground. This example shows how a desire to do

something for a small patch of woodland has become the catalyst for a much more active and social community.

“Our aim is to bring back a sense of community spirit to the village, something which we feel is lacking nationwide. We're adopting the village landscape in order to restore its amenity value and biodiversity” Peter Guy, Co-ordinator.

SHELL BETTER BRITAIN CAMPAIGN

This programme has been running since the 1970s, and has gradually evolved over the years from a prize scheme for nature conservation projects to a wider, community led agenda (www.sbbc.co.uk).

Two Hoops Biodiversity Project, Somerset. This project arose from the community wanting to move on from talking about Biodiversity Action Plans to actually doing something! It focussed on two owl species: barn owls and little owls,

and involved a mass survey day (The Biodiversity Big Day), but also arranged a biodiversity bike ride and a whole series of children's activities running over a year. The survey was used as a lead in to a range of other ideas.

Friends Of St Nicolas Fields, York, is a small urban nature park, designated in 1992, when the former clay pit was threatened with development as an industrial site, but was saved following a

campaign by local residents. As well as creating new habitats an environmental education and community centre has been

built, costing £300,000 in total, finally opening in 2000.

CAMLEY STREET NATURE PARK

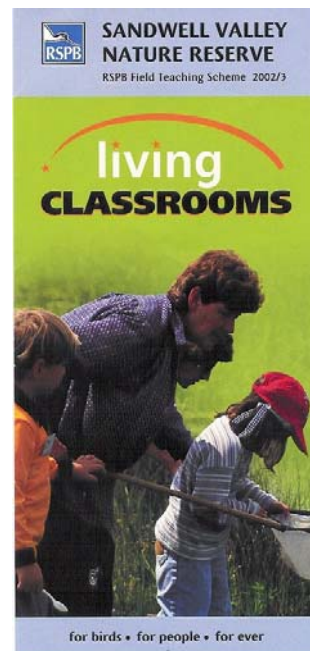
Camley Street Nature Park (www.wildlondon.org.uk/reserves/camleyst.htm) is perhaps one of the best known urban nature reserves, and was particularly prominent when threatened by the Channel

Tunnel rail link. 3700 school children visited in organised groups in 2000/01, and 1,000 attended an annual community festival.

SANDWELL VALLEY RSPB NATURE RESERVE

Sandwell Valley RSPB nature reserve, covering 10 ha, was opened in 1983, on the site of a reclaimed colliery, and receives over 20 000 visitors each year. There are a variety of habitats on the nature reserve – grassland, reed beds and a lake. It provides access for wheelchair users and runs a full series of guided walks and talks and an education programme.

‘Living Classroom’ is the teaching scheme on the reserve, well equipped with staff and facilities to make education accessible to all groups. Led by experienced field teachers the half or full day visits are designed to encourage curiosity and the process of discovery among all pupils. All courses are linked to the National Curriculum, in particular the Science, Geography and History curriculum guidelines. Sandwell and Camley Street both demonstrate the value of urban reserves, which are accessible to large



numbers of people, provide facilities for disabled access, and run a range of events that attract a wide cross section from the local community.

PARISH WILDLIFE WARDEN SCHEME

A very successful example of Agenda 21 in action, at a local level is the North Somerset Council’s “Parish Wildlife Warden” Scheme. This started as an idea at a local Biodiversity Action Plan meeting, and now has over 90 wardens, far beyond the number of parishes. The

project has become autonomous, responsibility has been taken on by key figures in the scheme (rather than led by the Council), and it has a steering group comprised of the Council, Bristol and Region Environmental Records Centre and the volunteer wardens themselves.

The network keep in touch via an in house newsletter, and the wardens themselves organise training days and social events. They have close links with wildlife groups, such as Avon Wildlife Trust and the Levels and Moors Projects. Training

focussed examples include: hedgerow surveys, managing old orchards and toad road crossing schemes. The cultural, historical and social aspects of the training and networking are of equal interest to the Parish Wildlife Wardens.

ELDER STUBBS ALLOTMENTS

These allotments comprise a 12 acre site in Cowley, Oxford. Over the last ten years it has proactively 'reinvented' the nature of allotments, to save them from falling into disuse and to make them attractive to local residents. This has included:

- Developing the site to incorporate woodland, a wildflower meadow, pond and orchard with 46 different kinds of fruit.
- Establishing play areas for ploholders' children.
- Participating in the annual visual arts festival in Oxfordshire 'Artsweek'.
- Opening the site as an educational resource for local schools.

The Elder Stubbs charity has developed a ten year relationship with a local mental health charity 'Restore', who cultivate over 2 acres of the vegetables, flowers and willow. Restore has one full time and four part time staff supporting the workers and is run jointly with the local NHS trust.

Another project connected with the allotments is called PORCH, working with the long term unemployed and the homeless. This well run project links across sectors, with gains all round.

The Elder Stubbs charity has sought funding from many sources to succeed, including Single Regeneration Budget, Barclays SiteSavers, Heritage Lottery Fund and local Charities, mental health care trusts and the Social Services.

"My Lords, the Government recognise the importance of allotment gardening for food provision, recreation and the sustainable regeneration of towns and cities....we feel that local government might well examine the role that it plays in promoting sustainability in its plans under Local Agenda 21." Baroness Hayman, Hansard, 11.4.98.

CARING FOR GOD'S ACRE

'Caring for God's Acre', started in Shropshire, and looks at churchyards, which can be ideal for biodiversity, and also brings together groups of people in a community. A management plan is produced for each churchyard, including surveys on various habitats, for example trees, grassland, bats, fungi, lichens, or birds. Information and celebration days are held. CFGA is now involved with over

50 church groups in Shropshire, Herefordshire and Worcestershire.

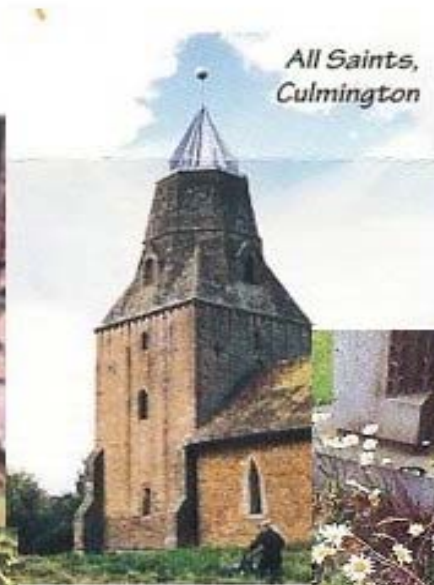
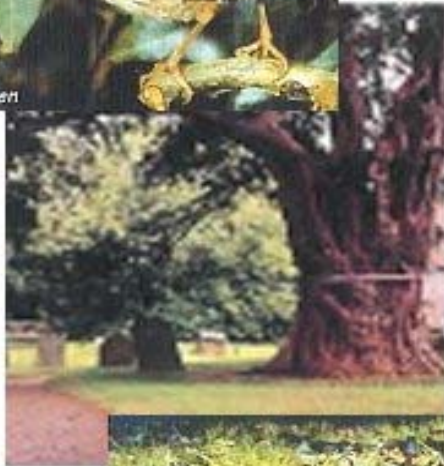
CFGA was initially funded by LEADER II, (European funds for rural disadvantaged areas), Rural Action, and the District Council as a three year project, starting in 1997. Organisations represented in the project are the Wildlife Trusts, Community Councils, Christian

Ecology Link, local councils, naturalist groups, county ecologists, and archaeologists. A steering group has now been set up and a charitable trust formed.

“Just to say ‘nature conservation’ is too narrow. Projects must look

more widely – at the buildings, education potential, economic aspect, tourism, local history and archaeology.”

Sue Cooper, Caring for God’s Acre.



4.4 Implications for biodiversity

Building community spirit cuts across many government and funding agencies agendas, both locally and nationally. It is associated with biodiversity on many levels and in wide reaching contexts. There are, however, some principles which have implications for biodiversity that apply to all situations and these should be of particular regard for policy makers.

The message ‘think local’ is borne out many times. Thinking local means active appreciation of a community and regard for their needs; speaking in a jargon-free language that they feel most at ease with, using their concerns and priorities to relate to biodiversity. Using this approach will tackle social issues, as well as focus on biodiversity. Biodiversity policy must recognise social issues, for example exclusion, standards of living and appreciate what is important to a community. Government agencies must not take a heavy handed approach; but operate with trust and respect with those delivering projects that are part of their community.

Is biodiversity itself an example of jargon that many will not relate to? And should biodiversity be only about native species? Some of the best examples of helping to develop community spirit come when a much wider view of what makes good wildlife conservation is taken.

Evaluation is important throughout the delivery of projects that receive funding. Quantified results are better than anecdotal evidence or individual examples. Social development, cultural, spiritual and community achievements can all be quantified, and opportunities should be taken to do so.

Potential projects must also understand the agenda of the funding agencies; the process should allow for two-way communication. However, the understanding needs to be among umbrella groups and environmental organisations, such as Groundwork, BTCV and the Wildlife Trusts that work with the community, and we hope that this report helps to contribute to that understanding.

5. Conclusions

The conclusions below have been drawn from our own analysis of policy and publications, but also from many discussions with people directly involved with our range of case studies. They are at the cutting face, and their perceptions are important for developing an understanding of both the strengths and weaknesses of these areas of work.

Increase communication with other countryside agencies

There is a degree of confusion in the environmental sector as to who does what; imagine how much greater that confusion is to a health professional looking in. The Countryside Agency has funded a number of innovative programmes, such as the Walking the Way to Health Initiative, but they have not yet reached a critical mass for the health sector to pick it up as mainstream. If English Nature wishes to support and champion the role of biodiversity in well-being, then there needs to be closer co-ordination and sharing with the Countryside Agency. The Forestry Commission has well developed social policies and research programmes, and the Environment Agency is now offering external advice on biodiversity issues.

Understanding other sectors' agendas

English Nature and other nature conservation organisations need to know how to connect with other sectors e.g. health and social services. A significant proportion of our case studies are a partnership of two or more organisations; there is scope for more understanding of the roles of others, and more integration. Often the best case studies succeed because of a strong input from professionals from other sectors, e.g. social or health workers. Delivery of the biodiversity agenda can sometimes be better delivered by non-ecologists who can make the connections with those other sectors.

Getting biodiversity in context

Biodiversity is only one part of a wider role for the environmental sector. Even within this sector it will have differing priorities and connotations. Many individuals do not connect with the phrase, and conservation organisations should be careful about using it. English Nature must look wider than just BAPs and native species if it is to support and be involved with community led projects that achieve wider aims, yet also deliver biodiversity gains.

Prove it!

To borrow a phrase. This repeats earlier messages, but is vital, and worthy of repeat. It is incumbent on environmental organisations to make out their own case. To achieve this, it will be important to be able to speak to relevant agencies on their terms, and relate projects to the targets of those agencies. Where possible, it is important to be able to quantify benefits, rather than rely on qualitative assertion.

Funding

The best projects generate a life of their own, but all need initial support. More challenging sites need permanent support. How often does a project take a year to get into its stride, deliver well for a year and then spend the last year diverting time and resources to bidding for replacement/continuation funding? Yet, organisations delivering these initiatives live in an ever-changing funding environment, with constant new initiatives, and constant bidding for limited resources. Sometimes that competition takes too many resources in the bidding and consequently fails to deliver the intended efficiencies. If an idea is good, stay with it. Perhaps it is time to concentrate on moving best examples to a wider geographic coverage?

The ease of access to funding can make or break biodiversity projects at a local level. This can be expressed at three levels:

1. Schemes need to be widely publicised and easy to apply for, with a minimum of bureaucracy, operating with trust and confidence in those delivering the schemes. Two-tier application arrangements may help, and it is necessary to recognise that occasional mistakes will be made. But the resources released from administration will more than compensate.
2. Match funding, which should always allow contributions in kind, including volunteer labour. Match funding is often seen as a stumbling block by smaller groups who are not used to playing the funding game. Indeed, for small schemes 100% funding can be cost effective and justifiable.

3. Good umbrella schemes should be supported beyond three-year programmes. More challenging schemes at local level may also need permanent support.

The voluntary sector

Map and understand what the voluntary sector is doing, and use established delivery agents and mechanisms with direct links into local communities. Work with existing partners such as Wildlife Trusts, BTCV and Groundwork, rather than setting up new structures to deliver new initiatives.

Successful schemes

Case studies in this report demonstrate what makes a scheme work. Key elements are: a good fund raiser/administrator, committed people in the community, organised project managers (of people and land), the power of volunteers, and a comprehensive understanding of direction and focus of a project. This understanding now has to encompass the agenda of agencies in other government sectors. But it is often the case that environmentalists are shy about blowing their own trumpet. We must demonstrate to a wider audience success and good practice for a number of reasons. Is their success being recognised by the funders and future funders?

Government policy

Planning and social development issues are well to the fore in recognising the role of biodiversity, and there are increasingly strong links with the health service sector. However, the role of biodiversity in culture seems to be recognised only through funding mechanisms in place through Heritage Lottery Fund and local arts projects. This is an area that should be addressed.

English Nature

Regardless of who leads or initiates a project, government agencies could take an increasing role in promoting the good work they are associated with. The critical audience for promotion is potential funders and policy makers and the role of English Nature is therefore of the highest importance in their capacity as an advisory body to the government and all its departments.

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Top left: Radio tracking a hare on Pawlett Hams, Somerset.

Paul Glendell/English Nature 23,020

Middle left: Identifying moths caught in a moth trap at Ham Wall NNR, Somerset.

Paul Glendell/English Nature 24,888

Bottom left: Using a home-made moth trap.

Peter Wakely/English Nature 17,396

Main: Co₂ experiment at Roudsea Wood and Mosses NNR, Lancashire.

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