

HEALTH AND PARKS

Summary of information from the GreenSpace North West email network

'Access to green space is a powerful weapon in the fight against obesity and ill-health'

Enhancing Urban Green Space, National Audit Office 2006

'This Government profoundly believes that the state of the local environment affects and reflects the well-being of the people living there'

Baroness Andrews OBE, ODPM

This document summarises responses from the GreenSpace North West email network to a question posted by Dr Liz Pots at Liverpool John Moores University. Liz is undertaking a research project to look at heath and green spaces in the region and she recently circulated a questionnaire to local authorities. She is pleased with the response and I will keep you updated on her progress.

There is increasing evidence that green space can make a significant contribution towards improving health and this is now accepted by government and features in the 2004 Public Health White Paper. This white paper resulted in [Choosing Activity: A Physical Activity Action Plan](#), which not only includes a goal to continue to make our public spaces and the countryside more accessible and attractive; it also expects NHS providers and Primary Care Trusts to work more closely with local government to create opportunities for physical activity. The main mechanism given for achieving these partnerships is Local Area Agreements.

Following are examples demonstrating that collaboration brings significant benefits to the community, to the health service and to the green spaces involved. There is also a list of research evidence that make the case for the health benefits of green space.

Examples

Examples of partnerships with Primary Care Trusts are the joint Sefton MBC and BTCV Green Gym and Manchester's healthy walk schemes. Both are direct referral from GPs.

An interesting Australian example is the [Healthy Parks, Healthy People](#) project set up by Parks Victoria. This has now been extended to [Sydney's parks](#).

[PlantforLife](#) is project initiated by the Horticultural Trades Association aimed at raising the awareness of plants and the role that they can play in enhancing people's quality of life.

BTCV have information on their [green gyms](#) on their website.

The 2005 ILAM North West Regional Best Practice Award was won by the partnership of the parks and open spaces department from Sefton Metropolitan Borough Council, the BTCV, the Sefton Primary Care Trust and the Sefton Allotments Association who have introduced the BTCV's Green Gym project to their borough. The project has attracted over £250,000 worth of funding from a variety of sources and is based on allotment sites throughout the district.

The aim of the project is to show residents how gardening can get you fit and active. Apart from catering for all ages in the community the Green Gym in Sefton has also successfully targeted people from disadvantaged groups as well those with learning and physical disabilities.

The funding has enabled the building of an HQ at the Queensway site and the appointment of an officer to drive the project forward. The participants (known as volunteers) have not only constructed raised gardens for people in wheelchairs, an ornamental pond and dozens of flower beds, vegetable patches and herb gardens, but have also taken on a variety of administrative tasks, with the help of the Community Volunteer Service, to ensure the sustainability of the project.

[IIAM website](#)

Research

CABE Space have a research report on this topic underway and it will be circulated when it has been published.

The [BTCV Green Gym website](#) has a good section for health professionals which talks in specific terms about the health benefits and the research they have done to back them up.

RSPB published a research report written by Dr Bird in 2004 entitled [Natural Fit. Can Green Space and Biodiversity Increase Levels of Physical Activity](#)

A literature review was done in 2002 for the Health Parks Healthy People project in Parks Victoria, Australia. The review is titled [The Health Benefits of Contact With Nature in a Park Context](#). The report is extensive; however if you are short on time Appendix A contains a list of key assertions about the health benefits in parks, identifying which have research evidence to support them and which do not. For example the report cites three papers with evidence to support that 'observing nature can restore concentration and improve productivity'.

Anything to add? Please contact [Ros Johnson](#). Thank you to all contributors.

GreenSpace North West email network is an association of individuals and organisations who share information for their mutual benefit. Please be advised that nothing found here has been checked by the organisation. That is not to say that you will not gain valuable information from the network; usually you will. However, **GreenSpace North West cannot guarantee the validity of the information**